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*R. W. Emerson*

THE AMERICAN SCHOLAR  
SELF-RELIANCE  
COMPENSATION

BY  
RALPH WALDO EMERSON

EDITED WITH NOTES AND SUGGESTIONS FOR STUDY BY  
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EM. AMER. SCH.

W. P. 1

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## INTRODUCTION.

RALPH WALDO EMERSON, poet, essayist, and philosopher, was born in Boston, May 25, 1803. He was the second of five sons of the Rev. William Emerson, minister of the First (Congregational) Church in Boston. His mother was Ruth Haskins, a woman of strong character and superior mental abilities. He had a minister for an ancestor for eight generations back, either on the paternal or the maternal side. Thus he inherited his spiritual and intellectual tendencies from a long line of distinguished progenitors. His aunt, Mary Moody Emerson, a woman of rare intellectual attainments, was one of his early companions and exerted a remarkable influence over his development.

Emerson began his studies at the public grammar school at the age of eight, and four years later he attended the Latin School. In 1817 he entered Harvard. He was not distinguished for proficiency in the studies of the curriculum, but he was superior to most of his classmates in his knowledge of general literature. He was especially interested in the study of Greek and history, and much of his time was spent in the library. He graduated in 1821.

For five years after leaving college Emerson taught school. In 1823 he began to study for the ministry under Dr. Channing. He was "approved to preach" in 1826 by the Middlesex

Association of Ministers, but owing to ill health he did not enter immediately upon his public duties, but spent the following winter in Florida. On his return from the South he preached in New Bedford, Northampton, Concord, and Boston. On March 11, 1829, he was ordained as a colleague of the Rev. Henry Ware, minister of the Second (Congregational Unitarian) Church in Boston. Eighteen months later, Dr. Ware resigned and the pastoral duties fell upon Emerson.

In September, 1829, he was married to Miss Ellen Louisa Tucker. Their married life was brief, as Mrs. Emerson died of consumption in February, 1832.

Emerson soon became troubled with doubts regarding his duties as a minister, and as sincerity was always his guiding star, he felt it his duty to proclaim these doubts to his congregation. Accordingly in September, 1832, he delivered a sermon on the Lord's Supper, in which he stated his scruples against administering that rite. As he and his congregation differed radically in these views, he resigned his pastorate and retired from public preaching.

In 1833 he visited Europe for the first time. There he met Coleridge, Wordsworth, and Carlyle, and formed with the last-named a lifelong friendship which resulted in their famous correspondence.

In the winter of 1833-34 he returned to the United States and began his career as a lecturer. At this period of his life he lived with Dr. Ripley in the "Old Manse," afterwards made famous by Hawthorne. The first lectures he delivered were "Water" and "The Relation of Man to the Globe." These were followed by three lectures on his European tour.

In 1834 he began his series of biographical lectures on Michael

Angelo, Milton, Luther, George Fox, and Edmund Burke. Those on Michael Angelo and George Fox were published later in the "North American Review."

In September, 1835, he was married to Miss Lydia Jackson of Plymouth, Mass. They went to live in "the plain, square, wooden house," in Concord, which was Emerson's home for the rest of his life.

During the next three winters Emerson delivered three courses of lectures in Boston: ten on English literature, in 1835; twelve on the philosophy of history, in 1836; and ten on human culture, in 1837.

In 1836 he wrote the "Concord Hymn" for the dedication ceremonies at the monument raised in honor of the Concord fight. It is one of the most beautiful poems he has written.

In 1836 his first volume, "Nature,"—a philosophic essay full of poetic thoughts,—was published anonymously. It was quite different from anything Emerson had written before, and it did not meet with a favorable reception. It was too vague for popular comprehension, and the time was not ripe for its full appreciation. It took five years to sell five hundred copies of it in the United States.

In 1836 the Symposium, or Transcendental Club, was organized, and Emerson became an active member. Among its other members were James Freeman Clarke, Theodore Parker, Bronson Alcott, Elizabeth P. Peabody, and Margaret Fuller. They discussed, besides a variety of other topics, religious justice, truth, mysticism, and the development of American genius.

From the last-named subject Emerson probably received the impulse which prompted him in 1837 to deliver his oration entitled "The American Scholar" before the Phi Beta Kappa



Society at Cambridge. The address was received by the audience with the utmost enthusiasm and approval.

On July 24, 1838, Emerson delivered an oration on literary ethics before the literary societies at Dartmouth College.

In the winter of 1838-39 he gave a course of ten lectures,—“The Doctrine of the Soul,” “Home,” “The School,” “Love,” “Genius,” “The Protest,” “Tragedy,” “Comedy,” “Duty,” “Demonology.”

His next address was “The Method of Nature,” delivered before the Society of the Adelphi in Waterville, Me., Aug. 11, 1841. Other addresses delivered about this time were “Man, the Reformer,” “Lecture on the Times,” “The Transcendentalist,” and “The Conservative.”

In July, 1840, a transcendental magazine called “The Dial” began its career under the editorship of Margaret Fuller. Emerson soon succeeded her as editor, and he contributed numerous articles to the paper. It was not a financial success, and was abandoned in 1844.

In 1841 Emerson’s first volume of collected essays was published. This volume now includes the following essays: “History,” “Self-Reliance,” “Compensation,” “Spiritual Laws,” “Love,” “Friendship,” “Prudence,” “Heroism,” “The Over-Soul,” “Circles,” “Intellect,” “Art,” “The Young American.” The last named was not published till 1844, but it now forms part of the “First Series of Essays.”

In February, 1842, Emerson wrote the pathetic “Threnody,” on the death of his dearly beloved son. In 1844 he delivered, in Concord, an address on the emancipation of the negroes in the British West Indies.

In 1844 the “Second Series of Essays” appeared. It includes:

"The Poet," "Experience," "Character," "Manners," "Gifts," "Nature," "Politics," "Nominalist and Realist," and "New England Reformers."

In 1847 Emerson's first volume of poems was published. This was chiefly a collection of poems which had appeared before, most of them in "The Dial."

In October, 1847, he sailed for Europe on an English lecture tour. Many of the lectures he delivered on this trip were published in a volume, "Representative Men," which appeared in 1850. It consists of a series of character sketches or mental portraits, each designed to represent a class. The essays are: "Lives of Great Men;" "Plato, or the Philosopher;" "Plato, New Readings;" "Swedenborg, or the Mystic;" "Montaigne, or the Skeptic;" "Shakespeare, or the Poet;" "Napoleon, or the Man of the World;" "Goethe, or the Writer."

In 1849 he returned to the United States. In 1850 he signed the call for the first Woman's Rights Convention. In 1852, conjointly with James Freeman Clarke and William Ellery Channing, he published the "Memoirs of Margaret Fuller Ossoli."

In January, 1855, he gave one of the lectures in a course of Antislavery Addresses, delivered in Boston, and in the same year he delivered an address before the Antislavery Party in New York. The plan he proposed was to buy the slaves from the owners and then liberate them.

"English Traits," the result of his observations in England, was published in 1856. In November, 1857, the "Atlantic Monthly" began its career in Boston with James Russell Lowell as editor. Many of the former contributors of "The Dial" wrote for this paper, among them Emerson, who contributed to

it some of his best poems. The "Essay on Persian Poetry" was published in this paper in 1858.

"The Conduct of Life" appeared in 1860. It contains essays on "Fate," "Power," "Wealth," "Culture," "Manners," "Behavior," "Worship," "Beauty," "Illusions," "Considerations by the Way." When we consider that twenty-five hundred copies of this book were sold in a few days we perceive how much Emerson had grown in favor in the twenty years since the publication of his first volume.

About this time a new paper called "The Dial" was started in Cincinnati, for which Emerson wrote several articles. In 1862 he delivered an address at Boston on the Emancipation Proclamation. The "Boston Hymn" was read by him in Music Hall, Jan. 1, 1863.

"Voluntaries" was published in the "Atlantic Monthly" in 1863, and "Saadi" in 1864, "My Garden" in 1866, and "Terminus" in 1867. These poems and others were collected in 1867 in a volume entitled "May Day and Other Pieces."

In 1866 Emerson received the degree of LL.D. from Harvard University, and in 1867 he was elected to their board of overseers. In the same year he delivered an oration on the Progress of Culture before the Phi Beta Kappa Society of Cambridge. This year practically marked the close of his literary career. Most of the works of note which appeared at a later date were published from manuscript written by him at an earlier period.

In 1868-70 he delivered a series of lectures at Harvard University on the "Natural History of the Intellect." "Society and Solitude," a new collection of essays, was published in 1870. The essays include: "Society and Solitude," "Civilization," "Art,"

"Eloquence," "Domestic Life," "Farming," "Weeks and Days," "Books," "Clubs," "Courage," "Success," "Old Age."

In 1871, accompanied by his daughter Edith, he made a trip to California. In July, 1872, his house caught fire. The shock he received on this occasion greatly hastened his mental decline. He was induced to go to Europe for his health, and on his return he found his house perfectly restored to its former condition by friends who had paid for it by voluntary subscriptions.

In December, 1874, he edited "Parnassus," a collection of poems by British and American authors. In the same year "Letters and Social Aims" appeared, containing the following essays: "Poetry and Imagination," "Social Aims," "Eloquence," "Resources," "The Comic," "Quotation and Originality," "Progress of Culture," "Persian Poetry," "Inspiration," "Greatness," "Immortality."

On March 30, 1878, he delivered a lecture in the Old South Church, Boston, on the "Fortune of the Republic." "The Sovereignty of Ethics" was published in the "North American Review" in 1878. In May, 1879, he read his address on "The Preacher" in Divinity College, Harvard. In 1881 he read a paper on Carlyle before the Massachusetts Historical Society.

His essay on "Superlatives" appeared in the "Century" for February, 1882.

In April, 1882, Emerson caught a severe cold, which developed into pneumonia, of which he died on April 27. He was buried in Concord near the graves of Hawthorne and Thoreau.

In addition to many short poems hitherto unpublished, two volumes of essays, "Miscellanies" and "Biographical Sketches," have appeared since his death.



To understand Emerson's works, we must inquire into his religious belief, since it permeates and colors all his writings. He belongs to the school of transcendentalism, but this word admits of many interpretations. Emerson himself defines it as "modern idealism." "The materialist," he tells us, "insists on facts, on history, on the force of circumstances and the animal wants of man; the idealist, on the power of Thought and of Will, on inspiration, on miracle, on individual culture. . . . The idealist takes his departure from his consciousness and reckons the world an appearance. . . . His thought, — that is the universe."

His precise attitude as to the conception of the Deity is difficult to define. He declares in one of his essays that "there is a sublime and friendly destiny by which the human race is guided — the race never dying, the individual never spared — to results affecting masses and ages."

Perhaps the following passage from Oliver Wendell Holmes will give us as good a conception as any, of Emerson's religious attitude:

"His creed was a brief one, but he carried it everywhere with him. In all he did, in all he said, and, so far as all outward signs could show, in all his thoughts, the indwelling Spirit was his light and guide; through all nature he looked up to nature's God; and if he did not worship the 'man Christ Jesus' as churches of Christendom have done, he followed his footsteps so nearly that our good Methodist, Father Taylor, spoke of him as more like Christ than any man he had known."

But, whatever we may think of his theological views, we cannot fail to admire his ethics. He aimed to be a teacher of men, a reformer of reformers. He preached by life as well as by word, and he insisted on a new code of morals. He was an idealist, and he insisted

the application of idealism to the everyday matters of life. His was a courageous and hopeful nature. He had unbounded confidence in the power for good in the human soul, and he preached untiringly the worth of the moral sentiment. He explored every province of human life and thought; he lent his voice in behalf of all great public measures; and he never lost an opportunity to prove himself a good citizen. His mission in life was to inspire others, to make life nobler, purer, loftier.

There is, perhaps, no writer regarding whom there is less consensus of opinion than of Emerson. The judgments formed of him are as various as the habits of thought in the critics. We may regard him in three phases: Emerson the essayist, Emerson the poet, and Emerson the philosopher and moral leader. In all these phases we find the most diverse opinions and criticisms regarding him.

Some say there never before was such a writer, poet, sage; others can find no sense in his writings and pronounce them mere empty words. One critic accords him a high place as a philosopher, but characterizes his poetry as inartistic and harsh; another ranks him among the greatest poets, and says of him, "The great poets addressed him as one of themselves; he was not of their audience, but of their choir;" while a third declares that his poetry is as devoid of life as his philosophy of wisdom. We give a few of these criticisms by men whose opinions are valued.

First let us hear what Oliver Wendell Holmes says:—

"The poet in Emerson never accurately differentiated itself from the philosopher. . . . Emerson is so essentially a poet that whole pages of his are like so many litanies of alternating chants and recitations. His thoughts slip on and off their light rhythmic

robes just as the mood takes him. Many of the metrical pre-ludes to his lectures are a versified and condensed abstract of the leading doctrine of the discourse. Emerson was not only a poet, but a very remarkable one. . . . He was a man of intuition, of insight, a seer, a poet with a tendency to mysticism which renders him sometimes obscure and once in a while almost, if not quite, unintelligible. He made desperate work now and then with rhyme and rhythm, showing that though a born poet he was not a born singer. . . . After all our criticisms we have to recognize that there is a charm in his poems which cannot be defined any more than the fragrance of a rose or a hyacinth. . . . No man would accuse Emerson of parsimony of ideas. He crams his pages with the very marrow of his thought. But in weighing out a lecture he was as punctilious as Portia about the pound of flesh. When the lecture had served its purpose it came before the public in the shape of an essay, but the essay never lost the character it borrowed from the conditions under which it was delivered; it was a lay sermon."

Now let us listen to Matthew Arnold:—

"And, in truth, one of the legitimate poets, Emerson, in my opinion, is not. His poetry is interesting; it makes one think, but it is not the poetry of one of the born poets. . . . I do not, then, place Emerson among the great poets. But I go farther and say that I do not place him among the great writers, the great men of letters. . . . Emerson has passages of noble and pathetic eloquence; he has passages of shrewd and felicitous wit; he has crisp epigram; he has passages of exquisitely touched observation of nature. Yet he is not a great writer; his style has not the requisite wholeness of good tissue. . . . Emerson cannot, I think, be called with justice a great philosophical



writer. He cannot build ; his arrangement of philosophical ideas has no progress in it — no evolution ; he does not construct a philosophy.”

Lastly, the Rev. C. A. Bartol, criticising the critic, says : —

“ Mr. Arnold, who has forgot the dreams and got so bravely over the supposed illusions of his youth, putting for them the depressing doubts and hopeless speculations of his age ; while he prizes Emerson’s spiritual substance, eschews as not good tissue his literary style. Moses, David, Paul, James, and Jesus, as reported by his amanuenses, under this self-confident critic’s cleaver, must lose their heads as writers and authors on the same block. They, too, are no weavers of words whose work is figured by the loom ; but brief, sententious, pictorial, ejaculatory, a quiver full of arrows being rather their type. Is there not a good prophetic and oracular as well as a didactic or dialectic style? ”

So we see that it is not safe to trust the opinion of any one critic. It is not always easy to understand Emerson ; his sentences are full of hidden meaning which cannot be detected at a glance ; they must be read and re-read to perceive the full drift of the thought ; but the thought in its fullness well repays us for the trouble. With unbiased mind and earnest purpose we must go to the storehouse of Emerson’s works, take from thence all the material we can gather, and with this as the basis, each according to his understanding, form his own judgment.

“ The American Scholar ” has been well called our literary declaration of independence. In it Emerson deplores the tendencies of Americans to devote their energies exclusively in the direction of mechanical skill, and he fearlessly accuses them of subserviency to European taste and style.

In treating of the education of the scholar, he recognizes three great influences, — Nature, the Past with its accumulation of books, and Action.

Nature he regards as the most important influence. "Know thyself" and "Study nature" are to him as one maxim. The classifying instinct is one of the first to be developed; we must learn to see that many things are governed by one law.

In speaking of the influence of the past, he dwells chiefly on books. The danger, he tells us, is in placing too much faith in books. "Instead of Man Thinking we have the bookworm. Books are the best of things, well used; abused, among the worst."

Action, though subordinate to the other influences, still is an essential factor in education. "It is the raw material out of which the intellect molds her splendid product." He emphasizes the dignity and necessity of labor, and spurns the idea that the scholar must withdraw from the practical issues of life. Having spoken of the scholar's education, he eloquently describes his duties, which, he tells us, are all included in self-trust. (If we would be true to ourselves, we must never yield to the popular cry, but manfully declare our independence, cost what it may, and hold to our belief though the whole world decry it.)

Lastly, he makes special application of these principles to the American Scholar. (He rejoices in the fact that people are beginning to be interested in near and common things instead of in the "doings in Italy and Arabia." "What would we really know the meaning of — the meal in the firkin, the milk in the pan, the ballad in the street." And he closes in that hopeful strain, so characteristic of Emerson, by expressing the utmost faith and confidence in the American Scholar.

Perhaps no other work of Emerson's has been less criticised and more universally approved. James Russell Lowell, in speaking of its delivery, says: "It was an event without any former parallel in our literary annals, a scene to be always treasured in the memory for its picturesqueness and its inspiration. What crowded and breathless aisles, what windows clustering with eager heads, what enthusiasm of approval, what grim silence of foregone dissent!"

In this oration are to be found the germs of those thoughts and principles which animate all the author's later works,—self-trust, self-culture, the dignity of labor, harmony and analogy in nature, intellectual and moral independence.) Emerson has been accused of burying his thoughts so deep that common seekers cannot find them; but in this essay, at least, few passages can be found which are not perfectly intelligible. Some of them, indeed, are so exquisitely expressed as to constitute veritable prose poems. The address, like all of Emerson's works, is full of quotations and allusions; yet Emerson is essentially original. He is the champion of mental freedom, and continually urges others to free themselves from the fetters of conventionality.

He practiced what he preached in this oration, and set the example of ignoring European methods and manners. The humblebee and the pine tree rather than the nightingale and the asphodel furnished his models.

Let us rejoice that Emerson no longer need complain of our subserviency to European taste. Since this address was delivered, we have had a host of original writers,—Cooper, Irving, Hawthorne, Bryant, Longfellow, Whittier, Lowell, Holmes, Whitman, and many others. The whole tendency of American literature has changed. As with one impulse it has grown more

original and more American. Emerson's rich and vigorous freshness has undoubtedly proved a stimulant to his contemporaries, and to him, more than to any other, we are indebted for the development of American scholarship.

It is hardly necessary to explain the theme of "Self-Reliance." The title is self-explanatory. It is the doctrine which Emerson preaches in "The American Scholar," reiterated and elaborated. When we read there, "In self-trust all the virtues are comprehended," we strike the keynote of this later essay. (To the self-reliant man everything is possible; he may become a genius, a leader of men, but without this one virtue, his case is hopeless.)

Some of us, perhaps, cannot agree with Emerson when he tells us it is right to ignore many of the ordinary duties of life for the sake of maintaining our individuality; but certain it is that conformity to the conventionalities of society stamps out from many a man his originality and individuality, and makes of him merely one of a mass of men. Let us see how it is in our own case. Suppose some one took enough interest in you or me to write our biography. Would it not read somewhat like this? "Mr. — was of such a nationality (Order). He belonged to such a religious sect (Class). He followed such a profession or engaged in such a business (Genus). He was a member of such a club, was interested in such a movement, etc. (Species)." These are all class distinctions, but where, we ask, is the attribute that shows his individuality, that makes him himself and distinguishes him from his companions B and C and D? Of this, alas! most men's lives leave no record.

In times of revolution, when conventionalities are forcibly thrust aside, our great men grow up like mushrooms in a night.



So we find in our own history that at no other time did our country produce so many great men as during the Revolutionary period and the period of the Civil War. Must we, then, wish for war and turmoil, or shall we rather believe with Emerson that if we would but be as brave as he would have us, the most peaceful times might fill our records with the achievements of men who now sink into unknown graves?

✓ In "Compensation" we strike one of Emerson's deeper and more philosophic veins,—that great theory of retribution on earth which makes us pause and hold our breath. Is it indeed true that "every excess causes a defect, every defect an excess?" that "for everything you have missed you have gained something else, and for everything you gain you lose something?" that "every secret is told, every crime is punished, every virtue rewarded, every wrong redressed, in silence and certainty?" The universal acceptance of this doctrine would work a revolution in society: for would not the wicked man fear to do wrong if he knew the punishment to be as inevitable as the laws of nature, and not dependent upon a possible detection and conviction by the judges of the world? And where would be the motive for his crime if he felt that he already possessed his full allotment of happiness, and that for everything he gained in one direction he would lose something in another? And would not the virtuous man be encouraged to persist all the more in his virtue if he knew that for every sacrifice he made there would be some reward,—a gain in character, if not a material compensation?

But the doctrine is one that is not easily learned. To be well understood it must be carefully taught by inspired men, by men

like Emerson himself: for all men have not his penetrating eye; they cannot see below the surface, and so long as the wrongdoer succeeds in his wrongdoing and the wicked man is rich and surrounded by friends, so long will he be envied. No matter what his mental turmoil may be, no matter though the poorest beggar in the street have greater peace of mind, to the world at large he appears happy and successful, and men continue to look for retribution in a life to come.

## THE AMERICAN SCHOLAR.<sup>1</sup>

MR. PRESIDENT AND GENTLEMEN,—

I GREET you on the recommencement of our literary year. Our anniversary is one of hope, and, perhaps, not enough of labor. We do not meet for games of strength or skill, for the recitation of histories, tragedies, and odes, like the ancient Greeks;<sup>2</sup> for parliaments of love and poesy, like the Troubadours;<sup>3</sup> nor for the advancement of science, like our contemporaries in the British and European capitals. Thus far, our holiday has been simply a friendly sign of the survival of the love of letters amongst a people too busy to give to letters any more. As such, it is precious as the sign of an indestructible instinct. <sup>10</sup> Perhaps the time is already come, when it ought to be, and will be, something else; when the sluggard intellect of this continent will look from under its iron lids,<sup>4</sup> and fill the postponed expectation of the world with something better than the exertions of

<sup>1</sup> This oration was delivered in August, 1837, before the Cambridge chapter of the Phi Beta Kappa Society, a society composed of honor students graduated from the various colleges.

<sup>2</sup> Public games were a religious institution in ancient Greece. The most important were the Olympic games celebrated in honor of Zeus. At first they comprised simply feats of strength, races, etc.; but later it became customary to indulge in intellectual exercises. Dramatic pieces and discourses were delivered, and artists exhibited their work while the games were in progress.

<sup>3</sup> Minstrels of Provence, in southern France, in the eleventh, twelfth, and thirteenth centuries. Their poetry was about love and gallantry or about war and chivalry. They sang at public festivals or at the courts of great barons or princes. They were also known as Provençal minstrels.

<sup>4</sup> Heavy lids.



mechanical skill. Our day of dependence, our long apprenticeship to the learning of other lands, draws to a close. The millions, that around us are rushing into life, cannot always be fed on the sere remains of foreign harvests. Events, actions arise, that must be sung, that will sing themselves. Who can doubt, that poetry will revive and lead in a new age, as the star in the constellation Harp, which now flames in our zenith, astronomers announce, shall one day be the polestar<sup>1</sup> for a thousand years?

In this hope, I accept the topic which not only usage, but the nature of our association, seem to prescribe to this day,—The AMERICAN SCHOLAR. Year by year, we come up hither to read one more chapter of his biography. Let us inquire what light new days and events have thrown on his character, and his hopes.

It is one of those fables, which, out of an unknown antiquity, convey an unlooked-for wisdom, that the gods, in the beginning, divided Man into men, that he might be more helpful to himself; just as the hand was divided into fingers, the better to answer its end.

The old fable covers a doctrine ever new and sublime; that there is One Man,—present to all particular men only partially, or through one faculty; and that you must take the whole society to find the whole man. Man is not a farmer, or a professor, or an engineer, but he is all. Man is priest, and scholar, and statesman, and producer, and soldier. In the *divided* or social state, these functions are parceled out to individuals, each of whom aims to do his stint of the joint work, whilst each other performs his. The fable implies, that the individual, to possess himself, must sometimes return from his own labor to embrace all the other laborers. But unfortunately, this original unit, this fountain of power, has been so distributed to multitudes, has been so minutely subdivided and peddled out, that it is spilled into drops, and cannot be gathered. The state of society is one in which the members have suffered amputation from the trunk,

<sup>1</sup> The north star, or the star in the zenith of the north pole of the earth.

and strut about so many walking monsters,—a good finger, a neck, a stomach, an elbow, but never a man.

Man is thus metamorphosed into a thing, into many things. The planter, who is Man sent out into the field to gather food, is seldom cheered by any idea of the true dignity of his ministry. 5 He sees his bushel and his cart, and nothing beyond, and sinks into the farmer, instead of Man on the farm. The tradesman scarcely ever gives an ideal worth to his work, but is ridden<sup>1</sup> by the routine of his craft, and the soul is subject to dollars. The priest becomes a form; the attorney, a statute book; the mechanic, 10 a machine; the sailor, a rope of a ship.

In this distribution of functions, the scholar is the delegated intellect. In the right state, he is, *Man Thinking*. In the degenerate state, when the victim of society, he tends to become a mere thinker, or, still worse, the parrot<sup>2</sup> of other men's thinking. 15

In this view of him, as *Man Thinking*, the theory of his office is contained. Him nature solicits with all her placid, all her monitory pictures; him the past instructs; him the future invites. Is not, indeed, every man a student, and do not all things exist for the student's behoof? And, finally, is not the true scholar 20 the only true master? But the old oracle said, "All things have two handles: beware of the wrong one."<sup>3</sup> In life, too often, the scholar errs with mankind and forfeits his privilege. Let us see him in his school, and consider him in reference to the main influences he receives. 25

I. The first in time and the first in importance of the influences upon the mind is that of nature. Every day, the sun; <sup>4</sup> and, after

<sup>1</sup> Tyrannized over.

<sup>2</sup> Imitator.

<sup>3</sup> The teachings of Epictetus (60?–120?), a Roman Stoic philosopher, have been handed down by one of his pupils, and preserved in two treatises, *Discourses of Epictetus*, and *Enchiridion*. From the latter of these works the quotation is made.

<sup>4</sup> The predicate must be supplied,—a construction which occurs frequently in this oration.

5 sunset, night and her stars. Ever the winds blow; ever the grass grows. Every day, men and women, conversing, beholding and beholden. The scholar is he of all men whom this spectacle most engages. He must settle its value in his mind. What is nature to him? There is never a beginning, there is never an end, to the inexplicable continuity of this web of God, but always circular<sup>1</sup> power returning into itself. Therein it resembles his own spirit, whose beginning, whose ending, he never can find,—so entire, so boundless. Far, too, as her splendors shine, system  
10 on system shooting like rays, upward, downward, without center, without circumference,—in the mass and in the particle, nature hastens to render account of herself to the mind. Classification begins. To the young mind, everything is individual, stands by itself. By and by, it finds how to join two things, and see in  
15 them one nature; then three, then three thousand; and so, tyrannized over by its own unifying<sup>2</sup> instinct, it goes on tying things together, diminishing anomalies, discovering roots running under ground, whereby contrary and remote things cohere, and flower out from one stem. It presently learns, that, since the dawn of  
20 history, there has been a constant accumulation and classifying of facts. But what is classification but the perceiving that these objects are not chaotic, and are not foreign, but have a law which is also a law of the human mind? The astronomer discovers that geometry, a pure abstraction of the human mind, is  
25 the measure of planetary motion. The chemist finds proportions and intelligible method throughout matter; and science is nothing but the finding of analogy, identity, in the most remote parts. The ambitious soul sits down before each refractory fact; one after another, reduces all strange constitutions, all new powers, to  
30 their class and their law, and goes on forever to animate the last fiber of organization, the outskirts of nature, by insight.

Thus to him, to this schoolboy under the bending dome of

<sup>1</sup> Circular, because without beginning and without end.

<sup>2</sup> Uniting into one.

day,<sup>1</sup> is suggested, that he and it proceed from one root; one is leaf and one is flower; relation, sympathy, stirring in every vein. And what is that Root? Is not that the soul of his soul? — A thought too bold,—a dream too wild. Yet when this spiritual light shall have revealed the law of more earthly natures,—when 5 he has learned to worship the soul, and to see that the natural philosophy that now is, is only the first gropings of its gigantic hand, he shall look forward to an ever-expanding knowledge as to a becoming creator.<sup>2</sup> He shall see, that nature is the opposite of the soul, answering to it part for part. One is seal, and one 10 is print. Its beauty is the beauty of his own mind. Its laws are the laws of his own mind. Nature then becomes to him the measure of his attainments. So much of nature as he is ignorant of, so much of his own mind does he not yet possess. And, in fine, the ancient precept, “Know thyself,”<sup>3</sup> and the modern 15 precept, “Study nature,” become at last one maxim.

II. The next great influence into the spirit of the scholar, is, the mind of the Past,—in whatever form, whether of literature, of art, of institutions, that mind is inscribed. Books are the best type of the influence of the past, and perhaps we shall get at the 20 truth,—learn the amount of this influence more conveniently,—by considering their value alone.

The theory of books is noble. The scholar of the first age received into him the world around; brooded thereon; gave it the new arrangement of his own mind, and uttered it again. It 25 came into him, life; it went out from him, truth. It came to him, short-lived actions; it went out from him, immortal thoughts. It came to him, business; it went from him, poetry. It was dead fact; now, it is quick thought. It can stand, and it can go. It now endures, it now flies, it now inspires. Precisely in propor- 30

<sup>1</sup> “Dome of day,” i.e., the sky.

<sup>2</sup> “Knowledge as to,” etc., i.e., knowledge will become a creator for him.

<sup>3</sup> A maxim of Chilo, one of the seven sages of Greece, who lived in the sixth century B.C.



tion to the depth of mind from which it issued, so high does it soar, so long does it sing.

Or, I might say, it depends on how far the process had gone, of transmuting life into truth. In proportion to the completeness of the distillation, so will the purity and imperishableness of the product be. But none is quite perfect. As no air pump can by any means make a perfect vacuum, so neither can any artist entirely exclude the conventional, the local, the perishable from his book, or write a book of pure thought, that shall be as efficient, in all respects, to a remote posterity, as to contemporaries, or rather to the second age. Each age, it is found, must write its own books; or rather, each generation for the next succeeding. The books of an older period will not fit this.

Yet hence arises a grave mischief. The sacredness which attaches to the act of creation,—the act of thought,—is transferred to the record. The poet chanting, was felt to be a divine man: henceforth the chant is divine also. The writer was a just and wise spirit: henceforward it is settled, the book is perfect; as love of the hero corrupts into worship of his statue. Instantly, the book becomes noxious: the guide is a tyrant. The sluggish and perverted mind of the multitude, slow to open to the incursions of Reason, having once so opened, having once received this book, stands upon it, and makes an outcry, if it is disparaged. Colleges are built on it. Books are written on it by thinkers, not by Man Thinking; by men of talent, that is, who start wrong, who set out from accepted dogmas, not from their own sight of principles. Meek young men grow up in libraries, believing it their duty to accept the views, which Cicero,<sup>1</sup> which Locke,<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Marcus Tullius Cicero (106–43 B.C.), Roman author, orator, and statesman. He stands preëminent as a specimen of the highest moral and intellectual culture of the ancient world.

<sup>2</sup> John Locke (1632–1704), English philosopher and theologian. His aim was to inquire into the original certainty and extent of human knowledge. His most famous work is his *Essay on the Human Understanding*.

which Bacon,<sup>1</sup> have given, forgetful that Cicero, Locke, and Bacon were only young men in libraries,<sup>2</sup> when they wrote these books.

Hence, instead of Man Thinking, we have the bookworm. Hence, the book-learned class, who value books, as such; not as related to nature and the human constitution, but as making a sort of Third Estate<sup>3</sup> with the world and the soul. Hence, the restorers of readings, the emendators, the bibliomaniacs of all degrees.

Books are the best of things, well used; abused, among the 10 worst. What is the right use? What is the one end, which all means go to effect? They are for nothing but to inspire. I had better never see a book, than to be warped by its attraction clean out of my own orbit, and made a satellite instead of a system. The one thing in the world, of value, is the active soul. 15 This every man is entitled to; this every man contains within him, although, in almost all men, obstructed, and as yet unborn. The soul active sees absolute truth; and utters truth, or creates. In this action, it is genius; not the privilege of here and there a favorite, but the sound estate of every man. In its essence, it is 20 progressive. The book, the college, the school of art, the institution of any kind, stop with some past utterance of genius. This is good, say they,—let us hold by this. They pin me down. They look backward and not forward. But genius looks forward: the eyes of man are set in his forehead, not in his hind- 25 head:<sup>4</sup> man hopes: genius creates. Whatever talents may be, if the man create not, the pure efflux of the Deity is not his;—

<sup>1</sup> Francis Bacon (1561–1626), English philosopher and statesman. He tried to recall philosophy from speculation and use it as an interpreter of nature. His most important work is the *Novum Organum* (New Method).

<sup>2</sup> “Young men in libraries,” i.e., young men like themselves.

<sup>3</sup> In some countries the population has been divided into three classes or estates, with respect to political rights and powers, as nobility, clergy, and people; lords temporal, lords spiritual, and commons, etc. The common people represent the “third estate.”

<sup>4</sup> The back part of the head.

cinders and smoke there may be, but not yet flame. There are creative manners, there are creative actions, and creative words; manners, actions, words, that is, indicative of no custom or authority, but springing spontaneous from the mind's own sense of good and fair.

On the other part, instead of being its own seer, let it receive from another mind its truth, though it were in torrents of light, without periods of solitude, inquest, and self-recovery, and a fatal disservice is done. Genius is always sufficiently the enemy of genius by overinfluence. The literature of every nation bears me witness. The English dramatic poets have Shakespearized<sup>1</sup> now for two hundred years.

Undoubtedly there is a right way of reading, so it be sternly subordinated. Man Thinking must not be subdued by his instruments. Books are for the scholar's idle times. When he can read God directly, the hour is too precious to be wasted in other men's transcripts of their readings. But when the intervals of darkness come, as come they must,—when the sun is hid, and the stars withdraw their shining,—we repair to the lamps which were kindled by their ray, to guide our steps to the East again, where the dawn is. We hear, that we may speak. The Arabian proverb says, "A fig tree, looking on a fig tree, becometh fruitful."

It is remarkable, the character of the pleasure we derive from the best books. They impress us with the conviction, that one nature wrote and the same reads. We read the verses of one of the great English poets, of Chaucer,<sup>2</sup> of Marvell,<sup>3</sup> of Dryden,<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Imitated Shakespeare. This is one of the many words which Emerson has coined.

<sup>2</sup> Geoffrey Chaucer (1340?–1400), the "Father of English Poetry," author of the famous *Canterbury Tales*.

<sup>3</sup> Andrew Marvell (1621–78), English poet, called the "British Aristides" on account of his great probity, the allusion being to the Athenian statesman Aristides, surnamed "the Just." The *Emigrants in the Bermudas* is Marvell's greatest poem.

<sup>4</sup> John Dryden (1631–1700), English poet. He was appointed poet laureate in 1668. One of his most popular poems is *The Ode for St. Cecilia's Day*.



with the most modern joy,—with a pleasure, I mean, which is in great part caused by the abstraction of all *time* from their verses. There is some awe mixed with the joy of our surprise, when this poet, who lived in some past world, two or three hundred years ago, says that which lies close to my own soul, that <sup>5</sup> which I also had well-nigh thought and said. But for the evidence thence afforded to the philosophical doctrine of the identity of all minds, we should suppose some preëstablished harmony, some foresight of souls that were to be, and some preparation of stores for their future wants, like the fact observed in insects, who lay <sup>10</sup> up food before death for the young grub they shall never see.

I would not be hurried by any love of system, by any exaggeration of instincts, to underrate the Book. We all know, that, as the human body can be nourished on any food, though it were boiled grass and the broth of shoes, so the human mind can be <sup>15</sup> fed by any knowledge. And great and heroic men have existed, who had almost no other information than by the printed page. I only would say, that it needs a strong head to bear that diet. One must be an inventor to read well. As the proverb says, “He that would bring home the wealth of the Indies, must carry <sup>20</sup> out the wealth of the Indies.”<sup>1</sup> There is then creative reading as well as creative writing. When the mind is braced by labor and invention, the page of whatever book we read becomes luminous with manifold allusion. Every sentence is doubly significant, and the sense of our author is as broad as the world. <sup>25</sup> We then see, what is always true, that, as the seer’s hour of vision is short and rare among heavy days and months, so is its record, perchance, the least part of his volume. The discerning will read, in his Plato<sup>2</sup> or Shakespeare,<sup>3</sup> only that least part,—only

<sup>1</sup> Spanish proverb.

<sup>2</sup> Plato (427–347 B.C.), Athenian author and philosopher, the father of idealism. He was a disciple of Socrates, whose memory and teachings he preserved in his Dialogues.

<sup>3</sup> William Shakespeare (1564–1616), the greatest of English poets and dramatists. His most popular plays are Merchant of Venice and Hamlet.

the authentic utterances of the oracle ; — all the rest he rejects, were it never so many times Plato's and Shakespeare's.

Of course, there is a portion of reading quite indispensable to a wise man. History and exact science he must learn by laborious reading. Colleges, in like manner, have their indispensable office, — to teach elements. But they can only highly serve us, when they aim not to drill, but to create ; when they gather from far every ray of various genius to their hospitable halls, and, by the concentrated fires, set the hearts of their youth on flame. Thought and knowledge are natures in which apparatus and pre-tension avail nothing. Gowns, and pecuniary foundations, though of towns of gold, can never countervail<sup>1</sup> the least sentence or syllable of wit.<sup>2</sup> Forget this, and our American colleges will recede in their public importance, whilst they grow richer every year.

III. There goes in the world a notion, that the scholar should be a recluse, a valetudinarian, — as unfit for any handiwork or public labor, as a penknife for an ax. The so-called "practical men" sneer at speculative men, as if, because they speculate or *see*, they could do nothing. I have heard it said that the clergy, — who are always, more universally than any other class, the scholars of their day, — are addressed as women ; that the rough, spontaneous conversation of men they do not hear, but only a mincing and diluted speech. They are often virtually disfranchised ; and, indeed, there are advocates for their celibacy. As far as this is true of the studious classes, it is not just and wise. Action is with the scholar subordinate, but it is essential. Without it, he is not yet man. Without it, thought can never ripen into truth. Whilst the world hangs before the eye as a cloud of beauty, we cannot even see its beauty. Inaction is cowardice, but there can be no scholar without the heroic mind. The preamble<sup>3</sup> of thought, the transition through which it passes from

<sup>1</sup> Prevail against.

<sup>2</sup> Sound sense.

<sup>3</sup> Prelude, or preliminary.

the unconscious to the conscious, is action. Only so much do I know, as I have lived. Instantly we know whose words are loaded with life, and whose not.

The world,—this shadow of the soul, or *other me*, lies wide around. Its attractions are the keys which unlock my thoughts 5 and make me acquainted with myself. I run eagerly into this resounding tumult. I grasp the hands of those next me, and take my place in the ring to suffer and to work, taught by an instinct, that so shall the dumb abyss be vocal with speech. I pierce its order; I dissipate its fear; I dispose of it within the 10 circuit of my expanding life. So much only of life as I know by experience, so much of the wilderness have I vanquished and planted, or so far have I extended my being, my dominion. I do not see how any man can afford, for the sake of his nerves and his nap, to spare any action in which he can partake. It is 15 pearls and rubies to his discourse. Drudgery, calamity, exasperation, want, are instructors in eloquence and wisdom. The true scholar grudges every opportunity of action passed by, as a loss of power.

It is the raw material out of which the intellect molds her 20 splendid products. A strange process too, this, by which experience is converted into thought, as a mulberry leaf is converted into satin.<sup>1</sup> The manufacture goes forward at all hours.

The actions and events of our childhood and youth, are now matters of calmest observation. They lie like fair pictures in the 25 air. Not so with our recent actions,—with the business which we now have in hand. On this we are quite unable to speculate. Our affections as yet circulate through it. We no more feel or know it, than we feel the feet, or the hand, or the brain of our body. The new deed is yet a part of life,—remains for a time 30 immersed in our unconscious life. In some contemplative hour, it detaches itself from the life like a ripe fruit, to become a thought of the mind. Instantly, it is raised, transfigured; the

<sup>1</sup> The silkworm feeds on the mulberry leaf, which furnishes the material from which it spins the silk that is manufactured into satin.

corruptible has put on incorruption.<sup>1</sup> Henceforth it is an object of beauty, however base its origin and neighborhood. Observe, too, the impossibility of antedating this act. In its grub state, it cannot fly, it cannot shine, it is a dull grub. But suddenly, without observation, the selfsame thing unfurls beautiful wings, and is an angel of wisdom. So is there no fact, no event, in our private history, which shall not, sooner or later, lose its adhesive, inert form, and astonish us by soaring from our body into the empyrean. Cradle and infancy, school and playground, the fear of boys, and dogs, and ferules,<sup>2</sup> the love of little maids and berries, and many another fact that once filled the whole sky, are gone already; friend and relative, profession and party, town and country, nation and world, must also soar and sing.

Of course, he who has put forth his total strength in fit actions, has the richest return of wisdom. I will not shut myself out of this globe of action, and transplant an oak into a flowerpot, there to hunger and pine; nor trust the revenue of some single faculty, and exhaust one vein of thought, much like those Savoyards,<sup>3</sup> who, getting their livelihood by carving shepherds, shepherdesses, and smoking Dutchmen, for all Europe, went out one day to the mountain to find stock, and discovered that they had whittled up the last of their pine trees. Authors we have, in numbers, who have written out their vein, and who, moved by a commendable prudence, sail for Greece or Palestine, follow the trapper into the prairie, or ramble round Algiers, to replenish their merchantable stock.

If it were only for a vocabulary, the scholar would be covetous of action. Life is our dictionary. Years are well spent in country labors; in town,—in the insight into trades and manufactures;

<sup>1</sup> 1 Cor. xv. 54.

<sup>2</sup> Corporal punishment at school administered with the ferule.

<sup>3</sup> Inhabitants of Savoy, south of Lake Geneva, the loftiest mountain region of Europe. Wood-carving was one of their chief industries, for which the forests of beech, birch, and pine, which have suffered deplorable clearances, furnished ample material.



in frank intercourse with many men and women; in science; in art; to the one end of mastering in all their facts a language by which to illustrate and embody our perceptions. I learn immediately from any speaker how much he has already lived, through the poverty or the splendor of his speech. Life lies behind us, as the quarry from whence we get tiles and copestones<sup>1</sup> for the masonry of to-day. This is the way to learn grammar. Colleges and books only copy the language which the field and the work-yard made.

But the final value of action, like that of books, and better than books, is, that it is a resource. That great principle of Undulation<sup>2</sup> in nature, that shows itself in the inspiring and expiring of the breath; in desire and satiety; in the ebb and flow of the sea; in day and night; in heat and cold; and as yet more deeply ingrained in every atom and every fluid, is known to us under the name of Polarity,<sup>3</sup>—these “fits of easy transmission and reflection,” as Newton<sup>4</sup> called them, are the law of nature because they are the law of spirit.

The mind now thinks; now acts; and each fit reproduces the other. When the artist has exhausted his materials, when the fancy no longer paints, when thoughts are no longer apprehended, and books are a weariness,—he has always the resource *to live*. Character is higher than intellect. Thinking is the function. Living is the functionary. The stream retreats to its source. A great soul will be strong to live, as well as strong to think. Does he lack organ or medium to impart his truths? He can still fall back on this elemental force of living them. This is a total act. Thinking is a partial act. Let the grandeur of justice shine in his affairs. Let the beauty of affection cheer

<sup>1</sup> Headstones of a wall.

<sup>2</sup> Wave motion.

<sup>3</sup> That quality or condition of a body by virtue of which it exhibits opposite or contrasted powers or properties in opposite directions.

<sup>4</sup> Sir Isaac Newton (1642–1727), English philosopher and mathematician. He discovered the law of gravitation and is regarded as the greatest of natural philosophers. His most important work was the *Principia*.

his lowly roof. Those "far from fame," who dwell and act with him, will feel the force of his constitution in the doings and passages of the day better than it can be measured by any public and designed display. Time shall teach him, that the scholar  
 5 loses no hour which the man lives. Herein he unfolds the sacred germ of his instinct, screened from influence. What is lost in seemliness is gained in strength. Not out of those, on whom systems of education have exhausted their culture, comes the helpful giant to destroy the old or to build the new, but out  
 10 of unhandseled<sup>1</sup> savage nature, out of terrible Druids<sup>2</sup> and Berserkirs<sup>3</sup> come at last Alfred<sup>4</sup> and Shakespeare.

I hear therefore with joy whatever is beginning to be said of the dignity and necessity of labor to every citizen. There is virtue yet in the hoe and the spade, for learned as well as for  
 15 unlearned hands. And labor is everywhere welcome; always we are invited to work; only be this limitation observed, that a man shall not for the sake of wider activity sacrifice any opinion to the popular judgments and modes of action.

I have now spoken of the education of the scholar by nature, by  
 20 books, and by action. It remains to say somewhat of his duties.

<sup>1</sup> A handsel is a gift; hence, ungifted or uncultured.

<sup>2</sup> An order of priests among the ancient Celts of Gaul, Britain, and Ireland. They believed in one Supreme Being and in the transmigration of the soul from one body to another. They were held in great awe, as disobedience to their mandates was followed by excommunication, in those days a terrible fate. They guarded the secret archives of the religion and acted as instructors and judges. Though they were well educated and understood many of the sciences, they also practiced divination and magic, and sacrificed human beings as part of their worship. The Druids revered the oak and the mistletoe, and their most profound ceremonies were performed in the depths of oak forests or in caves.

<sup>3</sup> Berserkir, or Berserker, was a hero in Scandinavian mythology who fought without armor, but overcame all opponents by his valor; hence the name Berserkirs was given to a class of warriors who fought naked under the influence of frenzy.

<sup>4</sup> Alfred the Great (849-901), King of the West Saxons, a distinguished



They are such as become Man Thinking. They may all be comprised in self-trust. The office of the scholar is to cheer, to raise, and to guide men by showing them facts amidst appearances. He plies the slow, unhonored, and unpaid task of observation. Flamsteed<sup>1</sup> and Herschel,<sup>2</sup> in their glazed observatories, 5 may catalogue the stars with the praise of all men, and, the results being splendid and useful, honor is sure. But he, in his private observatory, cataloguing obscure and nebulous stars of the human mind, which as yet no man has thought of as such,—watching days and months, sometimes, for a few facts; correcting 10 still his old records;—must relinquish display and immediate fame. In the long period of his preparation, he must betray often an ignorance and shiftlessness in popular arts, incurring the disdain of the able who shoulder him aside. Long he must stammer in his speech; often forego the living for the dead. 15 Worse yet, he must accept,—how often! poverty and solitude. For the ease and pleasure of treading the old road, accepting the fashions, the education, the religion of society, he takes the cross of making his own, and, of course, the self-accusation, the faint heart, the frequent uncertainty and loss of time, which are 20 the nettles and tangling vines in the way of the self-relying and self-directed; and the state of virtual hostility in which he seems

scholar and patron of learning. He is characterized by historians as the wisest, best, and greatest king that ever reigned in England.

<sup>1</sup> John Flamsteed (1646–1719), first English astronomer royal under Charles II. He was the first to explain the true principles of the equation of time. His *Historia Cœlistis Britannicæ*, in which he determined the position of nearly 3000 stars, was the first trustworthy catalogue of the stars.

<sup>2</sup> Sir William Herschel (1738–1822) was of German birth, but all his astronomical work was done in England. He accomplished more than any other man in the field of astronomy. He discovered the planet Uranus, and made many remarkable observations upon the physical constitution of the sun, and upon comets; but his most valuable service to the cause of astronomy consisted in his accurate observations upon variable and binary stars. He demonstrated the action upon the most distant members of the firmament of the same mechanical laws that bind together our solar system.

to stand to society, and especially to educated society. For all this loss and scorn, what offset? He is to find consolation in exercising the highest functions of human nature. He is one, who raises himself from private considerations, and breathes and  
5 lives on public and illustrious thoughts. He is the world's eye. He is the world's heart. He is to resist the vulgar prosperity that retrogrades ever to barbarism, by preserving and communicating heroic sentiments, noble biographies, melodious verse, and the conclusions of history. Whatsoever oracles the human  
10 heart, in all emergencies, in all solemn hours, has uttered as its commentary on the world of actions,—these he shall receive and impart. And whatsoever new verdict Reason from her inviolable seat pronounces on the passing men and events of today,—this he shall hear and promulgate.

15 These being his functions, it becomes him to feel all confidence in himself, and to defer never to the popular cry. He and he only knows the world. The world of any moment is the merest appearance. Some great decorum, some fetish<sup>1</sup> of a government, some ephemeral trade, or war, or man, is cried up by half  
20 mankind and cried down by the other half, as if all depended on this particular up or down. The odds are that the whole question is not worth the poorest thought which the scholar has lost in listening to the controversy. Let him not quit his belief that a popgun is a popgun, though the ancient and honorable of the  
25 earth affirm it to be the crack of doom. In silence, in steadiness, in severe abstraction, let him hold by himself; add observation to observation, patient of neglect, patient of reproach; and bide his own time,—happy enough, if he can satisfy himself alone, that this day he has seen something truly. Success treads<sup>2</sup>  
30 on every right step. For the instinct is sure, that prompts him to tell his brother what he thinks. He then learns, that in going down into the secrets of his own mind, he has descended into the secrets of all minds. He learns, that he who has mastered any

<sup>1</sup> An idol or object of blind devotion.

<sup>2</sup> Follows.

law in his private thoughts, is master to that extent of all men whose language he speaks, and of all into whose language his own can be translated. The poet, in utter solitude remembering his spontaneous thoughts and recording them, is found to have recorded that, which men in crowded cities find true for them also. The orator distrusts at first the fitness of his frank confessions,—his want of knowledge of the persons he addresses,—until he finds that he is the complement of his hearers;—that they drink his words because he fulfills for them their own nature; the deeper he dives into his privatest, secretest presentiment, to his wonder he finds, this is the most acceptable, most public, and universally true. The people delight in it; the better part of every man feels, This is my music; this is myself

In self-trust, all the virtues are comprehended. Free should the scholar be,—free and brave. Free even to the definition of freedom, “without any hindrance that does not arise out of his own constitution.” Brave; for fear is a thing, which a scholar by his very function puts behind him. Fear always springs from ignorance. It is a shame to him if his tranquillity, amid dangerous times, arise from the presumption, that, like children and women, his is a protected class; or if he seek a temporary peace by the diversion of his thoughts from politics or vexed questions, hiding his head like an ostrich in the flowering bushes,<sup>1</sup> peeping into microscopes, and turning rhymes, as a boy whistles to keep his courage up. So is the danger a danger still; so is the fear worse. Manlike let him turn and face it. Let him look into its eye and search its nature, inspect its origin,—see the whelping of this lion,—which lies no great way back; he will then find in himself a perfect comprehension of its nature and extent; he will have made his hands meet on the other side, and can henceforth defy it, and pass on superior. The world is his, who can see through its pretension. What deafness, what stone-blind custom, what overgrown error you behold is there only by sufferance,—

<sup>1</sup> The ostrich, when hunted, thrusts its head into a bush and imagines itself invisible because it cannot see the hunter.

by your sufferance. See it to be a lie, and you have already dealt it its mortal blow.

Yes, we are the cowed,— we the trustless. It is a mischievous notion that we are come late into nature; that the world was  
 5 finished a long time ago. As the world was plastic and fluid in the hands of God, so it is ever to so much of his attributes as we bring to it. To ignorance and sin, it is flint.<sup>1</sup> They adapt themselves to it as they may; but in proportion as a man has anything in him divine, the firmament flows before him and takes his  
 10 signet and form. Not he is great who can alter matter, but he who can alter my state of mind. They are the kings of the world who give the color of their present thought to all nature and all art, and persuade men by the cheerful serenity of their carrying the matter, that this thing which they do, is the apple  
 15 which the ages have desired to pluck, now at last ripe, and inviting nations to the harvest. The great man makes the great thing. Wherever Macdonald sits, there is the head of the table.<sup>2</sup> Linnæus<sup>3</sup> makes botany the most alluring of studies, and wins it from the farmer and the herb-woman; Davy,<sup>4</sup> chemistry; and

<sup>1</sup> "It is flint," i.e., hard or unimpressionable as flint.

<sup>2</sup> In Cervantes' *Don Quixote*, Sancho Panza, Don Quixote's squire, relates a story of a gentleman who, having invited a poor farmer to dine with him, pressed him to take the head of the table. The countryman, piquing himself on his good breeding, refused to take the place of honor, until his host, losing all patience, exclaimed, "Sit thee down, clodpole, for let me sit wherever I will, that will still be the upper end and the place of worship to thee." The same thought, modified in expression, is placed by different authors in the mouths of various men, and it is uncertain to which of several famous Scotchmen Emerson ascribes it.

<sup>3</sup> Carolus Linnæus, or Carl von Linne (1707-78), Swedish botanist. He established natural science upon its modern basis, and was, in botany and zoölogy, the foremost man of his time. His artificial system of plant classification, though now discarded, was simple and easily followed, and has greatly facilitated the study of botany.

<sup>4</sup> Sir Humphry Davy (1778-1829), English chemist. His greatest achievement was his account of the decomposition by galvanism of the fixed alkalies, by which he proved that these alkalies are metallic oxides.



Cuvier,<sup>1</sup> fossils. The day is always his, who works in it with serenity and great aims. The unstable estimates of men crowd to him whose mind is filled with a truth, as the heaped waves of the Atlantic follow the moon.<sup>2</sup>

For this self-trust, the reason is deeper than can be fathomed, 5  
—darker than can be enlightened. I might not carry with me the feeling of my audience in stating my own belief. But I have already shown the ground of my hope, in adverting to the doctrine that man is one. I believe man has been wronged; he has wronged himself. He has almost lost the light, that can lead 10  
him back to his prerogatives. Men are become of no account. Men in history, men in the world of to-day are bugs, are spawn, and are called "the mass" and "the herd." In a century, in a millennium, one or two men; that is to say,—one or two approxi- 15  
mations to the right state of every man. All the rest behold in 20  
the hero or the poet their own green and crude being,—ripened; yes, and are content to be less, so *that* may attain to its full stature. What a testimony,—full of grandeur, full of pity, is borne to the demands of his own nature, by the poor clansman, the poor partisan, who rejoices in the glory of his chief. The poor and 25  
the low find some amends to their immense moral capacity, for their acquiescence in a political and social inferiority. They are content to be brushed like flies from the path of a great person, so that justice shall be done by him to that common nature which it is the dearest desire of all to see enlarged and glorified. 30  
They sun themselves in the great man's light, and feel it to be their own element. They cast the dignity of man from their downtrod selves upon the shoulders of a hero, and will perish to add one drop of blood to make that great heart beat, those

<sup>1</sup> George Cuvier (1769–1832), French naturalist. He first applied to zoölogy the natural method, and founded a system of classification of animals based on their anatomical structure. He is regarded as the founder of the science of comparative anatomy.

<sup>2</sup> The attraction of the moon heaps up the waters of the sea into a broad, low wave, the passage of which forms the ebb and flow of the tide.

giant sinews combat and conquer. He lives for us, and we live in him.

Men such as they are, very naturally seek money or power; and power because it is as good as money,—the “spoils,” so called, “of office.” And why not? for they aspire to the highest, and this, in their sleep-walking, they dream is highest. Wake them, and they shall quit the false good, and leap to the true, and leave governments to clerks and desks. This revolution is to be wrought by the gradual domestication of the idea of Culture.

The main enterprise of the world for splendor, for extent, is the upbuilding of a man. Here are the materials strown<sup>1</sup> along the ground. The private life of one man shall be a more illustrious monarchy,—more formidable to its enemy, more sweet and serene in its influence to its friend, than any kingdom in history. For a man, rightly viewed, comprehendeth the particular natures of all men. Each philosopher, each bard, each actor, has only done for me, as by a delegate, what one day I can do for myself. The books which once we valued more than the apple of the eye, we have quite exhausted. What is that but saying, that we have come up with the point of view which the universal mind took through the eyes of one scribe; we have been that man, and have passed on. First, one; then another; we drain all cisterns, and, waxing greater by all these supplies, we crave a better and more abundant food. The man has never lived that can feed us ever. The human mind cannot be enshrined in a person, who shall set a barrier on any one side to this unbounded, unboundable empire. It is one central fire, which, flaming now out of the lips of Etna,<sup>2</sup> lightens the capes of Sicily; and, now out of the throat of Vesuvius,<sup>3</sup> illuminates the towers and vineyards of Naples. It is one light which

<sup>1</sup> Strown.

<sup>2</sup> A celebrated volcanic mountain of Sicily, the largest island in the Mediterranean Sea.

<sup>3</sup> A famous volcano, the most active in Europe, situated near Naples, the largest town in Italy.



beams out of a thousand stars. It is one soul which animates all men.

But I have dwelt perhaps tediously upon this abstraction of the Scholar. I ought not to delay longer to add what I have to say, of nearer reference to the time and to this country. 5

Historically, there is thought to be a difference in the ideas which predominate over successive epochs, and there are data for marking the genius of the Classic, of the Romantic, and now of the Reflective or Philosophical age. With the views I have intimated of the oneness or the identity of the mind through all 10 individuals, I do not much dwell on these differences. In fact, I believe each individual passes through all three. The boy is a Greek; the youth, romantic; the adult, reflective. I deny not, however, that a revolution in the leading idea may be distinctly enough traced. 15

Our age is bewailed as the age of Introversion.<sup>1</sup> Must that needs be evil? We, it seems, are critical; we are embarrassed with second thoughts; we cannot enjoy anything for hankering to know whereof the pleasure consists; we are lined with eyes; we see with our feet; the time is infected with Hamlet's unhappiness, — 20

“Sicklied o’er with the pale cast of thought.”<sup>2</sup>

Is it so bad then? Sight is the last thing to be pitied. Would we be blind? Do we fear lest we should outsee nature and God, and drink truth dry? I look upon the discontent of the literary 25 class, as a mere announcement of the fact, that they find themselves not in the state of mind of their fathers, and regret the coming state as untried; as a boy dreads the water before he has learned that he can swim. If there is any period one would desire to be born in, — is it not the age of Revolution; when the 30 old and the new stand side by side, and admit of being compared;

<sup>1</sup> Literally, turning inward; hence, reflection.

<sup>2</sup> Shakespeare's Hamlet, act iii, sc. i.

when the energies of all men are searched by fear and by hope ; when the historic glories of the old, can be compensated by the rich possibilities of the new era ? This time, like all times, is a very good one, if we but know what to do with it.

5 I read with joy some of the auspicious signs of the coming days, as they glimmer already through poetry and art, through philosophy and science, through church and state.

One of these signs is the fact, that the same movement which effected the elevation of what was called the lowest class in the  
10 state, assumed in literature a very marked and as benign an aspect. Instead of the sublime and beautiful ; the near, the low, the common, was explored and poetized. That, which had been negligently trodden under foot by those who were harnessing and provisioning themselves for long journeys into far countries,  
15 is suddenly found to be richer than all foreign parts. The literature of the poor, the feelings of the child, the philosophy of the street, the meaning of household life, are the topics of the time. It is a great stride. It is a sign,—is it not ? of new vigor, when the extremities are made active, when currents of warm life run  
20 into the hands and the feet. I ask not for the great, the remote, the romantic ; what is doing in Italy or Arabia ; what is Greek art, or Provençal minstrelsy ; I embrace the common, I explore and sit at the feet of the familiar, the low. Give me insight into to-day, and you may have the antique and future worlds.  
25 What would we really know the meaning of ? The meal in the firkin ; the milk in the pan ; the ballad in the street ; the news of the boat ; the glance of the eye ; the form and the gait of the body ;—show me the ultimate reason of these matters ; show me the sublime presence of the highest spiritual cause lurking, as  
30 always it does lurk, in these suburbs and extremities of nature ; let me see every trifle bristling with the polarity that ranges it instantly on an eternal law ; and the shop, the plow, and the leger,<sup>1</sup> referred to the like cause by which light undulates and poets sing ;—and the world lies no longer a dull miscellany and

<sup>1</sup> Old form of “ledger.”

lumber room, but has form and order ; there is no trifle ; there is no puzzle ; but one design unites and animates the farthest pinnacle and the lowest trench.

This idea has inspired the genius of Goldsmith,<sup>1</sup> Burns,<sup>2</sup> Cowper,<sup>3</sup> and, in a newer time, of Goethe,<sup>4</sup> Wordsworth,<sup>5</sup> and Carlyle.<sup>6</sup> This idea they have differently followed and with various success. In contrast with their writing, the style of Pope,<sup>7</sup> of Johnson,<sup>8</sup> of Gibbon,<sup>9</sup> looks cold and pedantic. This writing is blood-warm. Man is surprised to find that things near are not less beautiful and wondrous than things remote. The near explains the far. The drop is a small ocean. A man is related to all nature. This perception of the worth of the vulgar is fruitful

<sup>1</sup> Oliver Goldsmith (1728-74), Irish poet, historian, and novelist. The charm of his poetry lies in the fact that he enlists simple and universal feelings in behalf of the moral principle he seeks to establish. His best known poem is *The Deserted Village*, and his famous and only novel, *The Vicar of Wakefield*.

<sup>2</sup> Robert Burns (1759-96), Scottish poet, the poet of the people and of homely human nature. *Tam O'Shanter*, and *The Cotter's Saturday Night* are his most noted poems.

<sup>3</sup> William Cowper (1731-1800), English poet of simple human affections. He is best known by *The Task*, and *Table Talk*.

<sup>4</sup> Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (1749-1832), Germany's greatest philosophical poet. His masterpieces are *Faust*, and *Wilhelm Meister*.

<sup>5</sup> William Wordsworth (1770-1850), English poet of nature and of man. His longest poems are *The Prelude*, and *The Excursion*.

<sup>6</sup> Thomas Carlyle (1795-1881), British essayist and historian, noted for his deep insight into the nature of things. His most famous works are *History of the French Revolution*, and *Sartor Resartus*.

<sup>7</sup> Alexander Pope (1688-1744), English poet. Pope was a critical poet of no great originality. He cast other men's thoughts into finished verse. His most noted works are the *Essay on Man*, and the *Dunciad*.

<sup>8</sup> Samuel Johnson (1709-84), English miscellaneous writer, author of the didactic novel *Rasselas* and of the *Dictionary of the English Language*. He was a man of wonderful conversational powers, and his language is condensed and well-balanced like Pope's.

<sup>9</sup> Edward Gibbon (1737-94), English historian. His language is elaborate but he displays little sympathy with humanity. His great work is *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*.

in discoveries. Goethe, in this very thing the most modern of the moderns, has shown us, as none ever did, the genius of the ancients.

There is one man of genius, who has done much for this  
5 philosophy of life, whose literary value has never yet been rightly  
estimated; — I mean Emanuel Swedenborg.<sup>1</sup> The most imagi-  
native of men, yet writing with the precision of a mathematician,  
he endeavored to ingraft a purely philosophical Ethics on the  
popular Christianity of his time. Such an attempt, of course,  
10 must have difficulty, which no genius could surmount. But he  
saw and showed the connection between nature and the affec-  
tions of the soul. He pierced the emblematic or spiritual char-  
acter of the visible, audible, tangible world. Especially did his  
shade-loving muse<sup>2</sup> hover over and interpret the lower parts of  
15 nature; he showed the mysterious bond that allies moral evil to  
the foul material forms, and has given in epical parables<sup>3</sup> a the-  
ory of insanity, of beasts, of unclean and fearful things.

Another sign of our times, also marked by an analogous polit-  
ical movement, is the new importance given to the single person.  
20 Everything that tends to insulate the individual, — to surround  
him with barriers of natural respect, so that each man shall feel  
the world is his, and man shall treat with man as a sovereign  
state with a sovereign state; — tends to true union as well as  
greatness. "I learned," said the melancholy Pestalozzi,<sup>4</sup> "that  
25 no man in God's wide earth is either willing or able to help any

<sup>1</sup> Emanuel Swedenborg (1688–1772), founder of the New Jerusalem Church. He first applied himself to the problem of discovering the nature of the soul and spirit by anatomical studies, but a change came over him which made of the scientific inquirer a supernatural prophet.

<sup>2</sup> An inspiring power.

<sup>3</sup> An epic is a poem about heroic or great events; a parable is a moral fable or an allegory; hence, allegorical relations of great events or things.

<sup>4</sup> Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi (1746–1827), Swiss educational reformer, and author of *Leonard and Gertrude*. He was deeply in earnest in his work and spent his life with his pupils, sharing in their sufferings as well as in their play.



other man." Help must come from the bosom alone. The scholar is that man who must take up into himself all the ability of the time, all the contributions of the past, all the hopes of the future. He must be an university of knowledges. If there be one lesson more than another, which should pierce his ear, it is, 5  
 The world is nothing, the man is all; in yourself is the law of all nature, and you know not yet how a globule of sap ascends; in yourself slumbers the whole of Reason; it is for you to know all, it is for you to dare all. Mr. President and Gentlemen, this confidence in the unsearched might of man belongs, by all 10  
 motives, by all prophecy, by all preparation, to the American Scholar. We have listened too long to the courtly muses of Europe. The spirit of the American freeman is already suspected to be timid, imitative, tame. Public and private avarice make the air we breathe thick and fat. The scholar is decent, indo- 15  
 lent, complaisant. See already the tragic consequence. The mind of this country, taught to aim at low objects, eats upon itself. There is no work for any but the decorous and the complaisant. Young men of the fairest promise, who begin life upon our shores, inflated by the mountain winds, shined upon by all 20  
 the stars of God, find the earth below not in unison with these,—but are hindered from action by the disgust which the principles on which business is managed inspire, and turn drudges, or die of disgust,—some of them suicides. What is the remedy? They did not yet see, and thousands of young men as hopeful now 25  
 crowding to the barriers for the career, do not yet see, that, if the single man plant himself indomitably on his instincts, and there abide, the huge world will come round to him. Patience,—patience;—with the shades<sup>1</sup> of all the good and great for company; and for solace, the perspective of your own infinite life; and for 30  
 work, the study and the communication of principles, the making those instincts prevalent, the conversion of the world. Is it not

<sup>1</sup> Spirits or spiritual influence; so called because it was formerly believed that the soul, after its separation from the body, was perceptible to the sight, but not to the touch, in which respect it resembled a shadow or shade.



the chief disgrace in the world, not to be an unit; — not to be reckoned one character; — not to yield that peculiar fruit which each man was created to bear, but to be reckoned in the gross, in the hundred, or the thousand, of the party, the section, to  
s which we belong; and our opinion predicted geographically, as the north, or the south? Not so, brothers and friends, — please God, ours shall not be so. We will walk on our own feet; we will work with our own hands; we will speak our own minds. The study of letters shall be no longer a name for pity, for doubt,  
10 and for sensual indulgence. The dread of man and the love of man shall be a wall of defense and a wreath of joy around all. A nation of men will for the first time exist, because each believes himself inspired by the Divine Soul which also inspires all men.

## SELF - RELIANCE.

*"Ne te quæsieris extra."*<sup>1</sup>

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"MAN is his own star ; and the soul that can  
Render an honest and a perfect man,  
Commands all light, all influence, all fate ;  
Nothing to him falls early or too late.  
Our acts our angels are, or <sup>2</sup> good or ill,  
Our fatal shadows that walk by us still."

*Ep. to BEAUMONT and FLETCHER'S Honest Man's Fortune.*

<sup>1</sup> "Do not seek for anything outside of thyself."

<sup>2</sup> Whether.

CAST the bantling on the rocks,  
Suckle him with the she-wolf's teat;  
Wintered with the hawk and fox,  
Power and speed be hands and feet.

## SELF-RELIANCE.

I READ the other day some verses written by an eminent painter which were original and not conventional. The soul always hears an admonition in such lines, let the subject be what it may. The sentiment they instill is of more value than any thought they may contain. To believe your own thought, to believe that what is true for you in your private heart is true for all men,—that is genius. Speak your latent conviction, and it shall be the universal sense;<sup>1</sup> for the inmost in due time becomes the outmost,—and our first thought is rendered back to us by the trumpets of the Last Judgment. Familiar as the voice of the mind is to each, the highest merit we ascribe to Moses, Plato,<sup>2</sup> and Milton<sup>3</sup> is, that they set at naught books and traditions, and spoke not what men, but what they thought. A man should learn to detect and watch that gleam of light which flashes across his mind from within, more than the luster of the firmament<sup>4</sup> of bards and sages. Yet he dismisses without notice his thought, because it is his. In every work of genius we recognize our own rejected thoughts: they come back to us with a certain alienated majesty. Great works of art have no more affecting lesson for us than this. They teach us to abide by our spontaneous impression with good-humored inflexibility then most<sup>5</sup> when the whole cry of voices is on the other side. Else, to-mor-

<sup>1</sup> Opinion.

<sup>2</sup> See Note 2, p. 29.

<sup>3</sup> John Milton (1608–74), one of the greatest and most original of English poets, author of *Paradise Lost*.

<sup>4</sup> The heavens or canopy in which the stars appear to be placed; hence, to carry out the metaphor, the firmament, rather than the world, of bards and sages.

<sup>5</sup> “Then most,” i.e., most at that time.

row a stranger will say with masterly good sense precisely what we have thought and felt all the time, and we shall be forced to take with shame our own opinion from another.

There is a time in every man's education when he arrives at  
5 the conviction that envy is ignorance; that imitation is suicide;  
that he must take himself for better, for worse, as his portion;  
that though the wide universe is full of good, no kernel of nour-  
ishing corn can come to him but through his toil bestowed on  
that plot of ground which is given to him to till. The power  
10 which resides in him is new in nature, and none but he knows  
what that is which he can do, nor does he know until he has  
tried. Not for nothing one face, one character, one fact, makes  
much impression on him, and another none. This sculpture<sup>1</sup> in  
the memory is not without preëstablished harmony. The eye  
15 was placed where one ray should fall, that it might testify of that  
particular ray. We but half express ourselves, and are ashamed  
of that divine idea which each of us represents. It may be  
safely trusted as proportionate and of good issues, so<sup>2</sup> it be faith-  
fully imparted, but God will not have his work made manifest  
20 by cowards. A man is relieved and gay when he has put his  
heart into his work and done his best; but what he has said or  
done otherwise, shall give him no peace. It is a deliverance  
which does not deliver. In the attempt his genius deserts him;  
no muse befriends; no invention, no hope.

25 Trust thyself: every heart vibrates to that iron string. Ac-  
cept the place the divine providence has found for you, the so-  
ciety of your contemporaries, the connection of events. Great  
men have always done so, and confided themselves childlike to  
the genius of their age, betraying their perception that the abso-  
30 lutely trustworthy was seated at their heart, working through  
their hands, predominating in all their being. And we are now  
men, and must accept in the highest mind the same transcendent

<sup>1</sup> Image.

<sup>2</sup> "Proportionate," etc., i.e., of correct proportions and of good results, so long as.



destiny; and not minors and invalids in a protected corner, not cowards fleeing before a revolution, but guides, redeemers, and benefactors, obeying the Almighty effort, and advancing on Chaos<sup>1</sup> and the Dark.

What pretty oracles nature yields us on this text, in the face <sup>5</sup> and behavior of children, babes, and even brutes! That divided and rebel mind, that distrust of a sentiment because our arithmetic has computed the strength and means opposed to our purpose, these<sup>2</sup> have not. Their mind being whole, their eye is as yet unconquered, and when we look in their faces, we are dis- <sup>10</sup>concerted. Infancy conforms to nobody: all conform to it, so that one babe commonly makes four or five<sup>3</sup> out of the adults who prattle and play to it. So God has armed youth and puberty<sup>4</sup> and manhood no less with its own piquancy and charm, and made it enviable and gracious and its claims not to be put by, <sup>15</sup> if it will stand by itself. Do not think the youth has no force, because he cannot speak to you and me. Hark! in the next room his voice is sufficiently clear and emphatic. It seems he knows how to speak to his contemporaries. Bashful or bold, then, he will know how to make us seniors very unnecessary. <sup>20</sup>

The nonchalance<sup>5</sup> of boys who are sure of a dinner, and would disdain as much as a lord to do or say aught to conciliate one, is the healthy attitude of human nature. A boy is in the parlor what the pit is in the playhouse;<sup>6</sup> independent, irresponsible, looking out from his corner on such people and facts as pass <sup>25</sup> by, he tries and sentences them on their merits, in the swift,

<sup>1</sup> The confused or formless elementary state in which the universe is supposed to have existed before order was developed; hence, disorder in general.

<sup>2</sup> Children, babes, and brutes.

<sup>3</sup> Supply "babes."

<sup>4</sup> The age of maturity.

<sup>5</sup> Indifference.

<sup>6</sup> In the early theaters the floor of the house, below the level of the stage, was known as the pit. The seats in this part were the cheapest in the house, and the people who assembled there were of a class who did not care much what others thought of them, but shouted and stamped their applause and hissed their disapproval, as the occasion seemed to demand.

summary way of boys, as good, bad, interesting, silly, eloquent, troublesome. He cumber himself never about consequences, about interests; he gives an independent, genuine verdict. You must court him: he does not court you. But the man is, as it were, clapped into jail by his consciousness. As soon as he has once acted or spoken with *éclat*<sup>1</sup> he is a committed person, watched by the sympathy or the hatred of hundreds, whose affections must now enter into his account. There is no Lethe<sup>2</sup> for this. Ah, that he could pass again into his neutrality! Who<sup>3</sup> can thus avoid all pledges, and having observed, observe again from the same unaffected, unbiased, unbribable, unaffrighted innocence, must always be formidable. He would utter opinions on all passing affairs, which being seen to be not private, but necessary, would sink like darts into the ear of men, and put them in fear.

These are the voices which we hear in solitude, but they grow faint and inaudible as we enter into the world. Society everywhere is in conspiracy against the manhood of every one of its members. Society is a joint-stock company, in which the members agree, for the better securing of his bread to each shareholder, to surrender the liberty and culture of the eater. The virtue in most request is conformity. Self-reliance is its aversion. It loves not realities and creators, but names and customs.

Whoso would be a man must be a nonconformist.<sup>4</sup> He who would gather immortal palms<sup>5</sup> must not be hindered by the name of goodness, but must explore if it be goodness.<sup>6</sup> Nothing is at

<sup>1</sup> A French word (pronounced ā klä') meaning brilliancy of success which attracts applause.

<sup>2</sup> Oblivion; from the ancient Greek myth of Lethe, the personification of oblivion, or from the river Lethe, in the lower world, of which the souls of the departed drank and forgot all they had done in the upper world.

<sup>3</sup> He who.

<sup>4</sup> One who does not conform to established opinions or creeds.

<sup>5</sup> Undying fame. A branch or leaf of the palm was anciently worn as a symbol of victory or rejoicing.

<sup>6</sup> "Explore," etc., i.e., himself investigate if the thing so called be really goodness.

last sacred but the integrity of your own mind. Absolve you to yourself,<sup>1</sup> and you shall have the suffrage<sup>2</sup> of the world. I remember an answer which when quite young I was prompted to make to a valued adviser, who was wont to importune me with the dear old doctrines of the church. On my saying, 5 What have I to do with the sacredness of traditions, if I live wholly from within? my friend suggested,—“But these impulses may be from below, not from above.” I replied, “They do not seem to me to be such; but if I am the Devil’s child, I will live then from the Devil.” No law can be sacred to me but that of 10 my nature. Good and bad are but names very readily transferable to that or this; the only right is what is after my constitution, the only wrong what is against it. A man is to carry himself in the presence of all opposition, as if everything were titular and ephemeral<sup>3</sup> but he. I am ashamed to think how easily we 15 capitulate to badges and names, to large societies and dead institutions. Every decent and well-spoken individual affects and sways me more than is right. I ought to go upright and vital,<sup>4</sup> and speak the rude truth in all ways. If malice and vanity wear the coat of philanthropy, shall that pass?<sup>5</sup> If an angry bigot 20 assumes this bountiful cause of Abolition, and comes to me with his last news from Barbadoes,<sup>6</sup> why should I not say to him, “Go love thy infant; love thy wood-chopper: be good-natured and modest: have that grace; and never varnish your hard, un-charitable ambition with this incredible tenderness for black folk 25 a thousand miles off. Thy love afar is spite at home.” Rough and graceless would be such greeting, but truth is handsomer than the affectation of love. Your goodness must have some

<sup>1</sup> “Absolve,” etc., i.e., justify yourself.

<sup>2</sup> Approval.

<sup>3</sup> “Titular and ephemeral,” i.e., existing in name only and of short duration.

<sup>4</sup> “I ought,” etc., i.e., I ought to act as if I were alive.

<sup>5</sup> Be tolerated.

<sup>6</sup> An island in the Atlantic Ocean, belonging to Great Britain, one of the Lesser Antilles. The inhabitants are mainly negroes who, prior to 1834, were slaves.

edge to it,—else it is none. The doctrine of hatred must be preached as the counteraction of the doctrine of love, when that pules and whines. I shun father and mother and wife and brother, when my genius calls me. I would write on the lintels  
 5 of the doorpost, *Whim*.<sup>1</sup> I hope it is somewhat better than whim at last, but we cannot spend the day in explanation. Expect me not to show cause why I seek or why I exclude company. Then, again, do not tell me, as a good man did to-day, of my obligation to put all poor men in good situations. Are they  
 10 *my* poor? I tell thee, thou foolish philanthropist, that I grudge the dollar, the dime, the cent, I give to such men as do not belong to me and to whom I do not belong. There is a class of persons to whom by all spiritual affinity I am bought and sold; for them I will go to prison, if need be; but your miscellaneous  
 15 popular charities; the education at college of fools; the building of meetinghouses to the vain end to which many now stand; alms to sots; and the thousand-fold Relief Societies;—though I confess with shame I sometimes succumb and give the dollar, it is a wicked dollar which by and by I shall have the manhood  
 20 to withhold.

Virtues are, in the popular estimate, rather the exception than the rule. There is the man *and* his virtues. Men do what is called a good action, as some piece of courage or charity, much as they would pay a fine in expiation of daily nonappearance on  
 25 parade. Their works are done as an apology or extenuation of their living in the world,—as invalids and the insane pay a high board. Their virtues are penances. I do not wish to expiate, but to live. My life is for itself and not for a spectacle. I much prefer that it should be of a lower strain, so it be genuine and  
 30 equal, than that it should be glittering and unsteady. I wish it to be sound and sweet, and not to need diet and bleeding.<sup>2</sup> I

<sup>1</sup> Emerson means to convey the idea that he would rather have his actions ascribed to mere caprice than to be compelled to spend his time in explaining them.

<sup>2</sup> A use of the sign for the thing signified. “Not to need diet and bleed-



ask primary evidence that you are a man, and refuse this appeal from the man to his actions. I know that for myself it makes no difference whether I do or forbear those actions which are reckoned excellent. I cannot consent to pay for a privilege where I have intrinsic right. Few and mean as my gifts may be, I actually am, and do not need for my own assurance or the assurance of my fellows any secondary testimony.

What I must do is all that concerns me, not what the people think. This rule, equally arduous in actual and in intellectual life, may serve for the whole distinction between greatness and meanness. It is the harder, because you will always find those who think they know what is your duty better than you know it. It is easy in the world to live after the world's opinion; it is easy in solitude to live after our own; but the great man is he who in the midst of the crowd keeps with perfect sweetness the independence of solitude.

The objection to conforming to usages that have become dead to you is, that it scatters your force. It loses your time and blurs the impression of your character. If you maintain a dead church, contribute to a dead Bible-society, vote with a great party either for the government or against it, spread your table like base housekeepers,—under all these screens I have difficulty to detect the precise man<sup>1</sup> you are. And, of course, so much force is withdrawn from your proper life. But do your work, and I shall know you. Do your work, and you shall reënforce yourself. A man must consider what a blindman's-buff is this game of conformity. If I know your sect, I anticipate your argument. I hear a preacher announce for his text and topic the expediency of one of the institutions of his church. Do I not know beforehand that not possibly can he say a new and spontaneous word? Do I not know that, with all this ostentation of examining the

ing" means not to be unhealthy, a special course of diet being frequently prescribed in cases of illness, and bleeding having been one of the first resources of the old medical practitioners.

<sup>1</sup> "The precise man," i.e., precisely what kind of a man.



grounds of the institution, he will do no such thing? Do I not know that he is pledged to himself not to look but at one side, — the permitted side, not as a man, but as a parish minister? He is a retained attorney, and these airs of the bench<sup>1</sup> are the emptiest affectation. Well, most men have bound their eyes with one or another handkerchief,<sup>2</sup> and attached themselves to some one of these communities of opinion. This conformity makes them not false in a few particulars, authors of a few lies, but false in all particulars. Their every truth is not quite true. Their two is not the real two, their four not the real four; so that every word they say chagrins us, and we know not where to begin to set them right. Meantime nature is not slow to equip us in the prison-uniform of the party to which we adhere. We come to wear one cut of face and figure, and acquire by degrees the gentlest asinine<sup>3</sup> expression. There is a mortifying experience in particular, which does not fail to wreak itself also in the general history; I mean “the foolish face of praise,” the forced smile which we put on in company where we do not feel at ease in answer to conversation which does not interest us. The muscles, not spontaneously moved, but moved by a low usurping willfulness, grow tight about the outline of the face with the most disagreeable sensation.

For nonconformity the world whips you with its displeasure. And therefore a man must know how to estimate a sour face. The bystanders look askance on him in the public street or in the friend’s parlor. If this aversation<sup>4</sup> had its origin in contempt and resistance like his own, he might well go home with a sad countenance; but the sour faces of the multitude, like their sweet faces, have no deep cause, but are put on and off as the wind blows and a newspaper directs. Yet is the discontent of the multitude more formidable than that of the senate and the

<sup>1</sup> Court of justice.

<sup>2</sup> An extension of the metaphor of the blindman’s-buff.

<sup>3</sup> Like an ass, or stupid.

<sup>4</sup> A turning away from.

college. It is easy enough for a firm man who knows the world to brook the rage of the cultivated classes. Their rage is decorous and prudent, for they are timid as being very vulnerable themselves. But when to their feminine<sup>1</sup> rage the indignation of the people is added, when the ignorant and the poor are aroused, when the unintelligent brute force that lies at the bottom of society is made to growl and mow,<sup>2</sup> it needs the habit of magnanimity and religion to treat it godlike as a trifle of no concernment.

The other terror that scares us from self-trust is our consistency; a reverence for our past act or word, because the eyes of others have no other data for computing our orbit<sup>3</sup> than our past acts, and we are loth to disappoint them.

But why should you keep your head over your shoulder? Why drag about this corpse of your memory, lest you contradict somewhat<sup>4</sup> you have stated in this or that public place? Suppose you should contradict yourself; what then? It seems to be a rule of wisdom never to rely on your memory alone, scarcely even in acts of pure memory, but to bring the past for judgment into the thousand-eyed<sup>5</sup> present, and live ever in a new day. In your metaphysics you have denied personality to the Deity; yet when the devout motions of the soul come, yield to them heart and life, though they should clothe God with shape and color. Leave your theory, as Joseph<sup>6</sup> his coat in the hand of the harlot, and flee.

A foolish consistency is the hobgoblin of little minds, adored by little statesmen and philosophers and divines. With consistency a great soul has simply nothing to do. He may as well concern himself with his shadow on the wall. Speak what you think now in hard<sup>7</sup> words, and to-morrow speak what to-morrow

<sup>1</sup> Feminine, because decorous and timid.

<sup>2</sup> To make grimaces.

<sup>3</sup> Course or path in life.

<sup>4</sup> Something.

<sup>5</sup> Thousand-eyed, because there may be thousands of witnesses to things that happen in the present, while for the past we must rely on memory and history.

<sup>6</sup> Gen. xxxix. 12.

<sup>7</sup> Strong and enduring.

thinks in hard words again, though it contradict everything you said to-day. — "Ah, so you shall be sure to be misunderstood." — Is it so bad, then, to be misunderstood? Pythagoras was misunderstood, and Socrates, and Jesus, and Luther, and Copernicus, and Galileo, and Newton,<sup>1</sup> and every pure and wise spirit that ever took flesh. To be great is to be misunderstood.

I suppose no man can violate his nature. All the sallies<sup>2</sup> of his will are rounded in by the law of his being, as the inequalities of Andes and Himmaleh<sup>3</sup> are insignificant in the curve of the sphere. Nor does it matter how you gauge and try him. A character is like an acrostic or Alexandrian stanza; — read it forward, backward, or across, it still spells the same thing.<sup>4</sup> In this pleasing, contrite wood-life which God allows me, let me record

<sup>1</sup> Pythagoras (582–507 B.C.), a famous Greek philosopher, and leader in a movement for ethical and religious reform. He died in banishment. Socrates (469–399 B.C.), one of the most famous of Athenian philosophers and teachers of truth, virtue, and self-control, was ridiculed, imprisoned, and died a martyr; Jesus was crucified; Martin Luther (1483–1546), a German Augustine monk, protested against certain abuses that had grown up within the Catholic Church, and became the leader of the Reformation or religious revolution. He was excommunicated by the church and outlawed by the state. Nicholas Copernicus (1473–1543), a Polish astronomer, was the originator of the theory that the planets revolve around the sun. This theory was opposed to the prejudices and dogmas of the time and was not generally accepted until many years after his death. Galileo, or Galilei (1564–1642), was a famous Italian astronomer, mathematician, physicist, and inventor of the refracting telescope by means of which he discovered the mountainous character of the moon, the phases of the planet Venus, the satellites of Jupiter, and the rings of Saturn. His physical discoveries were heard with incredulity by the physicists of his time, and he was subjected to persecution and imprisonment by the Inquisition because of them. Sir Isaac Newton (1642–1727), the great English philosopher and mathematician who discovered the law of gravitation. His teachings were hotly contested and only adopted after many years.

<sup>2</sup> Digressions.

<sup>3</sup> Andes and Himmaleh (Himalaya), the great mountain ranges of South America and Asia respectively.

<sup>4</sup> It is the palindrome, not the acrostic or Alexandrian stanza, which has this peculiarity.

day by day my honest thought without prospect or retrospec-  
 I cannot doubt, it will be found symmetrical, though I mean it  
 and see it not. My book should smell of pines and resound with the  
 hum of insects. The swallow over my window should interweave  
 that thread or straw he carries in his bill into my web also.<sup>2</sup> We pass 5  
 for what we are. Character teaches above our wills. Men imagine  
 that they communicate their virtue or vice only by overt actions,  
 and do not see that virtue or vice emit a breath every moment.

There will be an agreement in whatever variety of actions, so  
 they be each honest and natural in their hour. For of one will, 10  
 the actions will be harmonious, however unlike they seem. These  
 varieties are lost sight of at a little distance, at a little height of  
 thought. One tendency unites them all. The voyage of the  
 best ship is a zigzag line of a hundred tacks.<sup>3</sup> See the line from  
 a sufficient distance, and it straightens itself to the average tend- 15  
 ency. Your genuine action will explain itself, and will explain  
 your other genuine actions. Your conformity explains nothing.  
 Act singly, and what you have already done singly will justify  
 you now. Greatness appeals to the future. If I can be firm  
 enough to-day to do right, and scorn eyes, I must have done 20  
 so much right before as to defend me now. Be it how it will,  
 do right now. Always scorn appearances, and you always may.  
 The force of character is cumulative. All the foregone days of  
 virtue work their health into this. What makes the majesty of  
 the heroes of the senate and the field, which so fills the imagina- 25  
 tion? The consciousness of a train of great days and victories  
 behind. They shed an united light on the advancing actor.  
 He is attended as by a visible escort of angels. That is it which  
 throws thunder into Chatham's<sup>4</sup> voice, and dignity into Wash-

<sup>1</sup> "Without prospect," etc., i.e., without looking backward or forward.

<sup>2</sup> Emerson means to express by this whole passage that our lives should be natural, not artificial or conventional.

<sup>3</sup> The short, oblique courses back and forth by which a sailing vessel advances against a headwind.

<sup>4</sup> William Pitt, Earl of Chatham (1708-78), one of the most distinguished



port, and America into Adams's<sup>1</sup> eye. Honor is venerable to us because it is no ephemeris.<sup>2</sup> It is always ancient virtue. We worship it to-day because it is not of to-day. We love it and pay it homage, because it is not a trap for our love and homage, but is self-dependent, self-derived, and therefore of an old immaculate pedigree, even if shown in a young person.

I hope in these days we have heard the last of conformity and consistency. Let the words be gazetted<sup>3</sup> and ridiculous henceforward. Instead of the gong for dinner, let us hear a whistle from the Spartan fife.<sup>4</sup> Let us never bow and apologize more. A great man is coming to eat at my house. I do not wish to please him; I wish that he should wish to please me. I will stand here for humanity, and though I would make it kind, I would make it true. Let us affront and reprimand the smooth mediocrity and squalid contentment of the times, and hurl in the face of custom, and trade, and office, the fact which is the upshot of all history, that there is a great responsible Thinker and Actor working wherever a man works; that a true man belongs to no other time or place, but is the center of things. Where he is, there is nature. He measures you, and all men, and all events. Ordinarily, everybody in society reminds us of somewhat else, or of some other person. Character, reality, reminds you of nothing else; it takes place of the whole creation. The man must be so much, that he must make all circumstances indifferent. Every

of English statesmen. He was possessed of great eloquence and all his actions were impelled by deep patriotic feeling.

<sup>1</sup> Samuel Adams (1722-1803), American statesman. Adams was a conspicuous agitator of the popular cause in America, a prominent member of the Continental Congress at Philadelphia, and one of the signers of the Declaration of Independence. He is called the "Father of the Revolution."

<sup>2</sup> A journal or account of daily transactions.

<sup>3</sup> Officially announced.

<sup>4</sup> The Spartans of ancient Greece were especially noted for their courage and valor. The signal of attack in battle was given by the music of the fife or flute. Hence, "instead of the gong," etc., instead of a mere summons to dinner let us have something that will inspire us to bravery.



true man is a cause, a country, and an age; requires spaces and numbers and time fully to accomplish his designs, and posterity seem to follow his steps as a train of clients. man Cæsar<sup>1</sup> is born, and for ages after we have a Roman Empire. Christ is born, and millions of minds so grow and cleave to his genius, that he is confounded with virtue and the possible<sup>2</sup> of man. An institution is the lengthened shadow of one man; as, Monachism, of the Hermit Antony;<sup>3</sup> the Reformation, of Luther; Quakerism, of Fox;<sup>4</sup> Methodism, of Wesley;<sup>5</sup> Abolition, of Clarkson.<sup>6</sup> Scipio, Milton called "the height of Rome;"<sup>7</sup> and all history resolves itself very easily into the biography of a few stout and earnest persons.

Let a man then know his worth, and keep things under his feet. Let him not peep or steal, or skulk up and down with the air of a charity-boy, a bastard, or an interloper, in the world which exists for him. But the man in the street, finding no worth in himself which corresponds to the force which built a

<sup>1</sup> Jūlius Cæsar (100–44 B.C.), the great Roman general, one of the greatest the world has ever seen, also preëminent as a statesman and as an orator. After subduing Gaul he crossed the Rubicon against his enemies in Rome. He became undisputed master of the known world, was made imperator for life, and sought to promote the true interests of his country. He laid a strong foundation to the imperial power of his successors.

<sup>2</sup> "Possible," i.e., that which it is possible for man to accomplish.

<sup>3</sup> Saint Antony or Anthony (251–356?), a voluntary hermit of Upper Egypt, founder of Monachism, the doctrine of a life of religious seclusion, asceticism, and devotion.

<sup>4</sup> George Fox (1624–91), an Englishman, founder of the Society of Friends, or Quakers.

<sup>5</sup> John Wesley (1703–91), an Englishman, founder of the religious sect of the Methodists.

<sup>6</sup> Thomas Clarkson (1760–1846), English philanthropist. He devoted his life to the abolition of the slave trade and the relief of the oppressed. Through his influence Parliament declared the slave trade illegal in 1807.

<sup>7</sup> See Milton's *Paradise Lost*, Book IX, line 510. Publius Cornelius Africanus Scipio Major (237–183? B. C.), the greatest Roman general before Cæsar. By his defeat of Hannibal he ended the long struggle between Rome and Carthage.

sculptured a marble god, feels poor when he looks on To him a palace, a statue, a costly book, have an alien forbidding air, much like a gay equipage, and seem to say like that, "Who are you, Sir?" Yet they all are his, suitors for his notice, petitioners to his faculties that they will come out and take possession. The picture waits for my verdict: it is not to command me, but I am to settle its claims to praise. That popular fable of the sot who was picked up dead drunk in the street, carried to the duke's house, washed and dressed and laid in the duke's bed, and, on his waking, treated with all obsequious ceremony like the duke, and assured that he had been insane,<sup>1</sup> owes its popularity to the fact, that it symbolizes so well the state of man, who is in the world a sort of sot, but now and then wakes up, exercises his reason, and finds himself a true prince.

Our reading is mendicant and sycophantic. In history, our imagination plays us false. Kingdom and lordship, power and estate, are a gaudier vocabulary than private John and Edward in a small house and common day's work; but the things of life are the same to both; the sum total of both is the same. Why all this deference to Alfred,<sup>2</sup> and Scanderbeg,<sup>3</sup> and Gustavus?<sup>4</sup> Suppose they were virtuous; did they wear out virtue? As great a stake depends on your private act to-day, as followed their public and renowned steps. When private men shall act with original views, the luster will be transferred from the actions of kings to those of gentlemen.

The world has been instructed by its kings, who have so mag-

<sup>1</sup> It is difficult to say where this fable originated. See the story of "The Sleeper Awakened" in the Arabian Nights, and the introduction to Shakespeare's *Taming of the Shrew*.

<sup>2</sup> See Note 4, p. 34.

<sup>3</sup> Scanderbeg (George Castriota, 1404 ?-68), an Albanian chief who abjured Islamism, and successfully conducted several crusades against the Turks.

<sup>4</sup> Gustavus II (Gustavus Adolphus, 1594-1632), King of Sweden. Law, order, and national spirit were encouraged during his reign, schools were everywhere established, roads made, and foreign trade extended. He even established model farms.

netized the eyes of nations. It has been taught by this colossal symbol the mutual reverence that is due from man to man. The joyful loyalty with which men have everywhere suffered the king, the noble, or the great proprietor to walk among them by a law of his own, make his own scale of men and things, and reverse theirs, pay for benefits not with money but with honor, and represent the law in his person, was the hieroglyphic<sup>1</sup> by which they obscurely signified their consciousness of their own right and comeliness, the right of every man.

The magnetism which all original action exerts is explained when we inquire the reason of self-trust. Who is the Trustee? What is the aboriginal<sup>2</sup> Self, on which a universal reliance may be grounded? What is the nature and power of that science-baffling star, without parallax,<sup>3</sup> without calculable elements, which shoots a ray of beauty even into trivial and impure actions, if the least mark of independence appear? The inquiry leads us to that source, at once the essence of genius, of virtue, and of life, which we call Spontaneity or Instinct. We denote this primary wisdom as Intuition, whilst all later teachings are tuitions. In that deep force, the last fact behind which analysis cannot go, all things find their common origin. For, the sense of being which in calm hours rises, we know not how, in the soul, is not diverse from things, from space, from light, from time, from man, but one with them, and proceeds obviously from the same source whence their life and being also proceed. We first share the life by which things exist, and afterwards see them as appearances in nature, and forget that we have shared their cause. Here is the fountain of action and of thought. Here are the lungs<sup>4</sup> of that inspiration which giveth man wisdom, and

<sup>1</sup> Hidden sign.

<sup>2</sup> Primitive, first.

<sup>3</sup> Apparent displacement of an object as observed from different points of view. The parallax of a heavenly body is used in estimating its distance, and decreases as the distance increases; hence, the exact location of a star so far distant as to have no parallax cannot be calculated.

<sup>4</sup> The source from which it draws breath; hence, the origin.

which cannot be denied without impiety and atheism. We lie in the lap of immense intelligence, which makes us receivers of its truth and organs of its activity. When we discern justice, when we discern truth, we do nothing of ourselves, but allow a passage to its beams. If we ask whence this comes, if we seek to pry into the soul that causes, all philosophy is at fault. Its presence or its absence is all we can affirm. Every man discriminates between the voluntary acts of his mind, and his involuntary perceptions, and knows that to his involuntary perceptions a perfect faith is due. He may err in the expression of them, but he knows that these things are so, like day and night, not to be disputed. My willful actions and acquisitions are but roving; — the idlest reverie, the faintest native emotion, command my curiosity and respect. Thoughtless people contradict as readily the statement of perceptions as of opinions, or rather much more readily; for, they do not distinguish between perception and notion. They fancy that I choose to see this or that thing. But perception is not whimsical, but fatal. If I see a trait, my children will see it after me, and in course of time, all mankind, — although it may chance that no one has seen it before me. For my perception of it is as much a fact as the sun.

The relations of the soul to the divine spirit are so pure, that it is profane to seek to interpose helps. It must be that when God speaketh he should communicate, not one thing, but all things; should fill the world with his voice; should scatter forth light, nature, time, souls, from the center of the present thought; and new date and new create the whole. Whenever a mind is simple, and receives a divine wisdom, old things pass away, — means, teachers, texts, temples fall; it lives now, and absorbs past and future into the present hour. All things are made sacred by relation to it, — one as much as another. All things are dissolved to their center by their cause, and, in the universal miracle, petty and particular miracles disappear. If, therefore, a man claims to know and speak of God, and carries you backward to the phraseology of some old moldered nation in another country, in another



world, believe him not. Is the acorn better than the oak which is its fullness and completion? Is the parent better than the child into whom he has cast his ripened being? Whence, then, this worship of the past? The centuries are conspirators against the sanity and authority of the soul. Time and space are but physiological colors which the eye makes, but the soul is light; where it is, is day; where it was, is night; and history is an impertinence and an injury, if it be anything more than a cheerful apologue or parable<sup>1</sup> of my being and becoming.

Man is timid and apologetic; he is no longer upright; he dares not say "I think," "I am," but quotes some saint or sage. He is ashamed before the blade of grass or the blowing rose. These roses under my window make no reference to former roses or to better ones; they are for what they are; they exist with God to-day. There is no time to them. There is simply the rose; it is perfect in every moment of its existence. Before a leaf bud has burst, its whole life acts; in the full-blown flower there is no more; in the leafless root there is no less. Its nature is satisfied, and it satisfies nature, in all moments alike. But man postpones or remembers; he does not live in the present, but with reverted<sup>2</sup> eye laments the past, or, heedless of the riches that surround him, stands on tiptoe to foresee the future. He cannot be happy and strong until he too lives with nature in the present, above time.<sup>3</sup>

This should be plain enough. Yet see what strong intellects dare not yet hear God himself, unless he speak the phraseology of I know not what David, or Jeremiah, or Paul. We shall not always set so great a price on a few texts, on a few lives. We are like children who repeat by rote the sentences of grandames<sup>4</sup> and tutors, and, as they grow older, of the men of talents and character they chance to see, — painfully recollecting the exact words they spoke; afterwards, when they come into the point of

<sup>1</sup> See Note 3, p. 44.

<sup>2</sup> Turned back.

<sup>3</sup> That is, apart from time past or time to come.

<sup>4</sup> Old women; grandmothers.



view which those had who uttered these sayings, they understand them, and are willing to let the words go; for, at any time, they can use words as good when occasion comes. If we live truly, we shall see truly. It is as easy for the strong man to be  
5 strong, as it is for the weak to be weak. When we have new perception, we shall gladly disburden the memory of its hoarded treasures as old rubbish. When a man lives with God, his voice shall be as sweet as the murmur of the brook and the rustle of the corn.

And now at last the highest truth on this subject remains un-  
10 said; probably cannot be said; for all that we say is the far-off remembering of the intuition. That thought, by what I can now nearest approach to say it, is this. When good is near you, when you have life in yourself, it is not by any known or accustomed way; you shall not discern the footprints of any other;  
15 you shall not see the face of man; you shall not hear any name;—the way, the thought, the good, shall be wholly strange and new. It shall exclude example and experience. You take the way from man, not to man. All persons that ever existed are its forgotten ministers. Fear and hope are alike beneath it.  
20 There is somewhat low even in hope. In the hour of vision, there is nothing that can be called gratitude, nor properly joy. The soul raised over passion beholds identity and eternal causation, perceives the self-existence of Truth and Right, and calms itself with knowing that all things go well. Vast spaces of  
25 nature, the Atlantic Ocean, the South Sea,—long intervals of time, years, centuries,—are of no account. This which I think and feel underlay every former state of life and circumstances, as it does underlie my present, and what is called life, and what is called death.

30 Life only avails, not the having lived. Power ceases in the instant of repose; it resides in the moment of transition from a past to a new state, in the shooting of the gulf, in the darting to an aim. This one fact the world hates, that the soul *becomes*; for that forever degrades the past, turns all riches to poverty, all  
35 reputation to a shame, confounds the saint with the rogue, shoves

Jesus and Judas equally aside. Why, then, do we prate of self-reliance? Inasmuch as the soul is present, there will be power not confident but agent.<sup>1</sup> To talk of reliance is a poor external way of speaking. Speak rather of that which relies, because it works and is. Who has more obedience than I masters me, 5 though he should not raise his finger. Round him I must revolve by the gravitation of spirits. We fancy it rhetoric, when we speak of eminent virtue. We do not yet see that virtue is Height, and that a man or a company of men, plastic and permeable to principles, by the law of nature must overpower and 10 ride<sup>2</sup> all cities, nations, kings, rich men, poets, who are not.

This is the ultimate fact which we so quickly reach on this, as on every topic, the resolution of all into the ever-blessed ONE. Self-existence is the attribute of the Supreme Cause, and it constitutes the measure of good by the degree in which it enters into 15 all lower forms. All things real are so by so much virtue as they contain. Commerce, husbandry, hunting, whaling, war, eloquence, personal weight, are somewhat, and engage my respect as examples of its presence and impure action. I see the same law working in nature for conservation and growth. Power is 20 in nature the essential measure of right. Nature suffers nothing to remain in her kingdoms which cannot help itself. The genesis and maturation of a planet, its poise and orbit, the bended tree recovering itself from the strong wind, the vital resources of every animal and vegetable, are demonstrations of the self-suf- 25 ficing, and therefore self-relying soul.

Thus all concentrates: let us not rove; let us sit at home with the cause. Let us stun and astonish the intruding rabble of men and books and institutions, by a simple declaration of the divine fact. Bid the invaders take the shoes from off their feet, 30 for God is here within.<sup>3</sup> Let our simplicity judge them, and our

<sup>1</sup> Power not reliant but active.

<sup>2</sup> "Overpower," etc., i.e., have power over and rule.

<sup>3</sup> The Mohammedans are obliged to take off their shoes before they are permitted to enter a mosque.

docility to our own law demonstrate the poverty of nature and fortune beside our native riches.

But now we are a mob. Man does not stand in awe of man, nor is his genius admonished to stay at home, to put itself in communication with the internal ocean, but it goes abroad to beg a cup of water of the urns of other men. We must go alone. I like the silent church before the service begins, better than any preaching. How far off, how cool, how chaste the persons look, begirt each one with a precinct or sanctuary! So let us always sit. Why should we assume the faults of our friend, or wife, or father, or child, because they sit around our hearth, or are said to have the same blood? All men have my blood, and I have all men's.<sup>1</sup> Not for that will I adopt their petulance or folly, even to the extent of being ashamed of it. But your isolation must not be mechanical, but spiritual, that is, must be elevation. At times the whole world seems to be in conspiracy to importune you with emphatic trifles. Friend, client, child, sickness, fear, want, charity, all knock at once at thy closet door, and say,—“Come out unto us.” But keep thy state; come not into their confusion. The power men possess to annoy me, I give them by a weak curiosity. No man can come near me but through my act. “What we love that we have, but by desire we bereave ourselves of the love.”

If we cannot at once rise to the sanctities of obedience and faith, let us at least resist our temptations; let us enter into the state of war, and wake Thor and Woden,<sup>2</sup> courage and constancy, in our Saxon breasts. This is to be done in our smooth times by speaking the truth. Check this lying hospitality and lying affection. Live no longer to the expectation of these deceived and deceiving people with whom we converse. Say to them, O father, O mother, O wife, O brother, O friend, I have lived

<sup>1</sup> An allusion to the fact that all men are brothers.

<sup>2</sup> In Norse mythology the god Woden was held to be all-powerful and noted for his constancy, while his eldest son Thor, the god of thunder, was the personification of strength and courage.

with you after appearances hitherto. Henceforward I am the truth's. Be it known unto you that henceforward I obey no law less than the eternal law. I will have no covenants but proximities.<sup>1</sup> I shall endeavor to nourish my parents, to support my family, to be the chaste husband of one wife,—but these relations I must fill after a new and unprecedented way. I appeal from your customs. I must be myself. I cannot break myself any longer for you, or you.<sup>2</sup> If you can love me for what I am, we shall be the happier. If you cannot, I will still seek to deserve that you should. I will not hide my tastes or aversions.<sup>10</sup> I will so trust that what is deep is holy, that I will do strongly before the sun and moon whatever inly<sup>3</sup> rejoices me, and the heart appoints. If you are noble, I will love you; if you are not, I will not hurt you and myself by hypocritical attentions. If you are true, but not in the same truth with me, cleave to <sup>15</sup> your companions; I will seek my own. I do this not selfishly, but humbly and truly. It is alike your interest, and mine, and all men's, however long we have dwelt in lies, to live in truth. Does this sound harsh to-day? You will soon love what is dictated by your nature as well as mine, and, if we follow the truth,<sup>20</sup> it will bring us out safe at last.—But so may you give these friends pain. Yes, but I cannot sell my liberty and my power, to save their sensibility. Besides, all persons have their moments of reason, when they look out into the region of absolute truth; then will they justify me, and do the same thing. 25

The populace think that your rejection of popular standards is a rejection of all standard, and mere antinomianism;<sup>4</sup> and the bold sensualist will use the name of philosophy to gild<sup>5</sup> his

<sup>1</sup> "I will," etc., i.e., I will agree to govern my conduct only according to the dictates of my inner consciousness, of my soul's intuitive sense of right.

<sup>2</sup> You in the singular, i.e., the particular person whom Emerson imagines himself as addressing.

<sup>3</sup> Within the soul.

<sup>4</sup> The doctrine that Christians are freed from the moral law as set forth in the Old Testament by the new dispensation of grace in the Gospel.

<sup>5</sup> Cover or conceal.



crimes. But the law of consciousness abides. There are two confessionals, in one or the other of which we must be shriven.<sup>1</sup> You may fulfill your round of duties by clearing yourself in the *direct*, or in the *reflex* way. Consider whether you have satisfied  
5 your relations to father, mother, cousin, neighbor, town, cat, and dog; whether any of these can upbraid you. But I may also neglect this reflex standard, and absolve me to myself. I have my own stern claims and perfect circle. It denies the name of duty to many offices that are called duties. But if I can dis-  
10 charge its debts, it enables me to dispense with the popular code. If any one imagines that this law is lax, let him keep its commandment one day.

And truly it demands something godlike in him who has cast off the common motives of humanity, and has ventured to trust  
15 himself for a taskmaster. High be his heart, faithful his will, clear his sight, that he may in good earnest be doctrine, society, law, to himself, that a simple purpose may be to him as strong as iron necessity is to others!

If any man consider the present aspects of what is called by  
20 distinction *society*, he will see the need of these ethics. The sinew and heart of man seem to be drawn out, and we are become timorous, desponding whimperers. We are afraid of truth, afraid of fortune, afraid of death, and afraid of each other. Our age yields no great and perfect persons. We want men and  
25 women who shall renovate life and our social state, but we see that most natures are insolvent, cannot satisfy their own wants, have an ambition out of all proportion to their practical force; and do lean and beg day and night continually. Our house-keeping is mendicant, our arts, our occupations, our marriages,  
30 our religion, we have not chosen, but society has chosen for us. We are parlor soldiers. We shun the rugged battle of fate, where strength is born.

If our young men miscarry in their first enterprises, they lose all heart. If the young merchant fails, men say he is *ruined*. If

1 Confessed.



the finest genius studies at one of our colleges, and is not installed in an office within one year afterwards in the cities or suburbs of Boston or New York, it seems to his friends and to himself that he is right in being disheartened, and in complaining the rest of his life. A sturdy lad from New Hampshire or Vermont, who in turn tries all the professions, who *teams it, farms it,<sup>1</sup> peddles,* keeps a school, preaches, edits a newspaper, goes to Congress, buys a township, and so forth, in successive years, and always, like a cat, falls on his feet, is worth a hundred of these city dolls. He walks abreast with his days, and feels no shame in not "study-<sup>10</sup> ing a profession," for he does not postpone his life, but lives already. He has not one chance, but a hundred chances. Let a Stoic<sup>2</sup> open the resources of man, and tell men they are not leaning willows, but can and must detach themselves; that with the exercise of self-trust, new powers shall appear; that a man<sup>15</sup> is the word made flesh,<sup>3</sup> born to shed healing to the nations, that he should be ashamed of our compassion, and that the moment he acts from himself, tossing the laws, the books, idolatries, and customs out of the window, we pity him no more, but thank and revere him,—and that teacher shall restore the life of man<sup>20</sup> to splendor, and make his name dear to all history.

It is easy to see that a greater self-reliance must work a revolution in all the offices and relations of men; in their religion; in their education; in their pursuits; their modes of living; their association; in their property; in their speculative views.<sup>25</sup>

1. In what prayers do men allow themselves!<sup>4</sup> That which they call a holy office is not so much as brave and manly. Prayer

1 "Teams it," etc., i.e., drives a team or engages in farming as a profession.

2 A disciple of the philosopher Zeno, who founded a sect and taught that men should be free from passion, unmoved by joy or grief, and should submit uncomplainingly to the inevitable; hence, the name is applied to any one who professes to be indifferent to pleasure or pain.

3 See John i. 14.

4 "In what prayers," etc., i.e., in what prayers do men allow themselves to indulge.

looks abroad and asks for some foreign addition to come through some foreign virtue, and loses itself in endless mazes of natural and supernatural, and mediatorial and miraculous. Prayer that craves a particular commodity, — anything less than all good, — is  
5 vicious. Prayer is the contemplation of the facts of life from the highest point of view. It is the soliloquy of a beholding and jubilant soul. It is the spirit of God pronouncing his works good. But prayer as a means to effect a private end is meanness and theft. It supposes dualism<sup>1</sup> and not unity in nature and con-  
10 sciousness. As soon as the man is at one with God, he will not beg. He will then see prayer in all action. The prayer of the farmer kneeling in his field to weed it, the prayer of the rower kneeling with the stroke of his oar, are true prayers heard throughout nature, though for cheap ends. Caratach, in Fletcher's "Bon-  
15 duca,"<sup>2</sup> when admonished to inquire the mind of the god Audate, replies, —

"His hidden meaning lies in our endeavors;  
Our valors are our best gods."

Another sort of false prayers are our regrets. Discontent is  
20 the want of self-reliance: it is infirmity of will. Regret calamities, if you can thereby help the sufferer; if not, attend your own work, and already the evil begins to be repaired. Our sympathy is just as base. We come to them who weep foolishly, and sit down and cry for company, instead of imparting to them truth  
25 and health in rough electric shocks, putting them once more in communication with their own reason. The secret of fortune is joy in our hands. Welcome evermore to gods and men is the self-helping man. For him all doors are flung wide: him all tongues greet, all honors crown, all eyes follow with desire. Our

<sup>1</sup> A twofold division.

<sup>2</sup> Caratach, or Caractacus, was a character in the play of Bonduca (another name for Boadicea), written by the English dramatist and poet John Fletcher (1579-1625). The scene of the play is laid in ancient Britain, where the characters were historical. Audate is another name for the Celtic goddess (not god) Audrasta.

love goes out to him and embraces him, because he did not need it. We solicitously and apologetically caress and celebrate him, because he held on his way and scorned our disapprobation. The gods love him because men hated him. "To the persevering mortal," said Zoroaster,<sup>1</sup> "the blessed Immortals are swift."

As men's prayers are a disease of the will, so are their creeds a disease of the intellect. They say with those foolish Israelites, "Let not God speak to us, lest we die. Speak thou, speak any man with us, and we will obey." Everywhere I am hindered of meeting God in my brother, because he has shut his own temple doors, and recites fables merely of his brother's, or his brother's brother's God. Every new mind is a new classification. If it prove a mind of uncommon activity and power, a Locke,<sup>2</sup> a Lavoisier,<sup>3</sup> a Hutton,<sup>4</sup> a Bentham,<sup>5</sup> a Fourier,<sup>6</sup> it imposes its classification on other men, and lo! a new system. In proportion to the depth of the thought, and so to the number of the objects it touches and brings within reach of the pupil, is his complacency. But chiefly is this apparent in creeds and churches, which are also classifications of some powerful mind acting on the elemental thought of duty, and man's relation to the Highest. Such is Calvinism,<sup>7</sup> Quakerism, Swedenborgism.<sup>8</sup> The pupil takes the same delight in subordinating everything to the new terminology, as a girl who has just learned botany in seeing a

<sup>1</sup> The founder of the ancient Persian religion. The time in which he lived is uncertain.

<sup>2</sup> See Note 2, p. 26.

<sup>3</sup> Antoine Laurent Lavoisier (1743-94), illustrious French chemist. He discovered the composition of water.

<sup>4</sup> James Hutton (1726-97), great Scotch geologist. He wrote the *Theory of Rain*, and *Theory of the Earth*.

<sup>5</sup> Jeremy Bentham (1748-1832), English philosopher and reformer. He devoted himself to reforms in legislature and government.

<sup>6</sup> François Marie Charles Fourier (1772-1837), French socialist.

<sup>7</sup> The doctrine of the followers of John Calvin (1509-64), French theologian.

<sup>8</sup> The doctrine taught by Emanuel Swedenborg. See Note 1, p. 44.

new earth and new seasons thereby. It will happen for a time, that the pupil will find his intellectual power has grown by the study of his master's mind. But in all unbalanced minds, the classification is idolized, passes for the end, and not for a speedily  
5 exhaustible means, so that the walls of the system blend to their eye in the remote horizon with the walls of the universe; the luminaries of heaven seem to them hung on the arch their master built. They cannot imagine how you aliens have any right to see;—how you can see; “It must be somehow that you stole  
10 the light from us.” They do not yet perceive, that light, unsystematic, indomitable, will break into any cabin, even into theirs. Let them chirp awhile and call it their own. If they are honest and do well, presently their neat new pifold<sup>1</sup> will be too strait<sup>2</sup> and low, will crack, will lean, will rot and vanish, and the im-  
15 mortal light, all young and joyful, million-orbed, million-colored, will beam over the universe as on the first morning.

2. It is for want of self-culture that the superstition of Traveling, whose idols are Italy, England, Egypt, retains its fascination for all educated Americans. They who made England,  
20 Italy, or Greece venerable in the imagination did so by sticking fast where they were, like an axis of the earth. In manly hours, we feel that duty is our place. The soul is no traveler; the wise man stays at home, and when his necessities, his duties, on any occasion call him from his house, or into foreign lands, he  
25 is at home still, and shall make men sensible by the expression of his countenance, that he goes the missionary of wisdom and virtue, and visits cities and men like a sovereign, and not like an interloper or a valet.

I have no churlish objection to the circumnavigation of the  
30 globe, for the purposes of art, of study, and benevolence, so that the man is first domesticated, or does not go abroad with the hope of finding somewhat greater than he knows. He who travels to be amused, or to get somewhat which he does not carry, travels away from himself, and grows old even in youth

<sup>1</sup> An inclosure for beasts.

<sup>2</sup> Narrow.



among old things. In Thebes,<sup>1</sup> in Palmyra,<sup>2</sup> his will and mind have become old and dilapidated as they. He carries ruins to ruins.

Traveling is a fool's paradise. Our first journeys discover to us the indifference of places. At home I dream that at Naples, <sup>5</sup> at Rome, I can be intoxicated with beauty, and lose my sadness. I pack my trunk, embrace my friends, embark on the sea, and at last wake up in Naples, and there beside me is the stern fact, the sad self, unrelenting, identical, that I fled from. I seek the Vatican,<sup>3</sup> and the palaces. I affect to be intoxicated with sights <sup>10</sup> and suggestions, but I am not intoxicated. My giant goes with me wherever I go.

3. But the rage of traveling is a symptom of a deeper unsoundness affecting the whole intellectual action. The intellect is vagabond, and our system of education fosters restlessness. <sup>15</sup> Our minds travel when our bodies are forced to stay at home. We imitate; and what is imitation but the traveling of the mind? Our houses are built with foreign taste; our shelves are garnished with foreign ornaments; our opinions, our tastes, our faculties, lean, and follow the Past and the Distant. The soul created the <sup>20</sup> arts wherever they have flourished. It was in his own mind that the artist sought his model. It was an application of his own thought to the thing to be done and the conditions to be observed. And why need we copy the Doric<sup>4</sup> or the Gothic<sup>5</sup> model? Beauty, convenience, grandeur of thought, and quaint <sup>25</sup> expression are as near to us as to any, and if the American

<sup>1</sup> The ruined prehistoric city, capital of Upper Egypt.

<sup>2</sup> A ruined city, founded by Solomon, in an oasis of the Syrian desert, a hundred and twenty miles northeast of Damascus.

<sup>3</sup> The residence of the Pope in Rome, the largest palace in the world, consisting of over four thousand rooms. It contains the finest existing collection of marbles, bronzes, frescoes, paintings, gems, and statues.

<sup>4</sup> A style of architecture distinguished for simplicity and strength, which originated in Doris in ancient Greece.

<sup>5</sup> A style of architecture derived from the Goths, with high and sharply pointed arches and clustered columns.



artist will study with hope and love the precise thing to be done by him, considering the climate, the soil, the length of the day, the wants of the people, the habit and form of the government, he will create a house in which all these will find themselves fitted, and taste and sentiment will be satisfied also.

Insist on yourself; never imitate. Your own gift you can present every moment with the cumulative force of a whole life's cultivation; but of the adopted talent of another, you have only an extemporaneous, half possession. That which each can do best, none but his Maker can teach him. No man yet knows what it is, nor can, till that person has exhibited it. Where is the master who could have taught Shakespeare?<sup>1</sup> Where is the master who could have instructed Franklin,<sup>2</sup> or Washington, or Bacon,<sup>3</sup> or Newton? Every great man is a unique. The Scipionism of Scipio is precisely that part he could not borrow. Shakespeare will never be made by the study of Shakespeare. Do that which is assigned you, and you cannot hope too much or dare too much. There is at this moment for you an utterance brave and grand as that of the colossal chisel of Phidias,<sup>4</sup> or trowel<sup>5</sup> of the Egyptians, or the pen of Moses, or Dante,<sup>6</sup> but different from all these. Not possibly will the soul all rich, all eloquent, with thousand-cloven<sup>7</sup> tongue, deign to repeat itself; but if you can hear what these patriarchs say, surely you can reply to them in the same pitch of voice; for the ear and the tongue are two organs of one nature. Abide in the simple and

<sup>1</sup> See Note 3, p. 29.

<sup>2</sup> Benjamin Franklin (1706-90), American philosopher, statesman, and writer. He discovered the nature of lightning, invented the lightning rod, performed important diplomatic services during the Revolution, and compiled the famous Poor Richard's Almanac.

<sup>3</sup> See Note 1, p. 27.

<sup>4</sup> Phidias (500?-432? B.C.), the greatest sculptor of Greece if not of all lands.

<sup>5</sup> The tool with which they reared the pyramids.

<sup>6</sup> Dante Alighieri (1265-1321), the greatest Italian poet, author of the *Inferno*.

<sup>7</sup> Divided into many parts; that is, capable of speaking in many ways.

noble regions of thy life, obey thy heart, and thou shalt reproduce the Foreworld<sup>1</sup> again.

4. As our Religion, our Education, our Art look abroad, so does our spirit of society. All men plume themselves on the improvement of society, and no man improves. 5

Society never advances. It recedes as fast on one side as it gains on the other. It undergoes continual changes; it is barbarous, it is civilized, it is christianized, it is rich, it is scientific; but this change is not amelioration. For everything that is given, something is taken. Society acquires new arts, and loses 10 old instincts. What a contrast between the well-clad, reading, writing, thinking American, with a watch, a pencil, and a bill of exchange in his pocket, and the naked New Zealander, whose property is a club, a spear, a mat, and an undivided twentieth of a shed to sleep under! But compare the health of the two 15 men, and you shall see that the white man has lost his aboriginal strength. If the traveler tell us truly, strike the savage with a broad ax, and in a day or two the flesh shall unite and heal as if you struck the blow into soft pitch, and the same blow shall send the white to his grave. 20

The civilized man has built a coach, but has lost the use of his feet. He is supported on crutches, but lacks so much support of muscle. He has a fine Geneva<sup>2</sup> watch, but he fails of the skill to tell the hour by the sun. A Greenwich nautical almanac<sup>3</sup> he has, and so being sure of the information when he wants it, 25 the man in the street does not know a star in the sky. The solstice he does not observe; the equinox he knows as little; and the whole bright calendar of the year is without a dial in his mind. His notebooks impair his memory; his libraries overload his wit; the insurance office increases the number of accidents; and 30

<sup>1</sup> A previous state of the world.

<sup>2</sup> Geneva, Switzerland, at one time produced the best watches in the world.

<sup>3</sup> An almanac for the use of navigators and astronomers, calculated at the Royal Observatory at Greenwich, England,

it may be a question whether 'machinery does not encumber; whether we have not lost by refinement some energy, by a Christianity intrenched in establishments and forms, some vigor of wild virtue. For every Stoic was a Stoic; but in Christendom  
 5 where is the Christian?

There is no more deviation in the moral standard than in the standard of height or bulk. No greater men are now than ever were. A singular equality may be observed between the great men of the first and of the last ages; nor can all the science,  
 10 art, religion, and philosophy of the nineteenth century avail to educate greater men than Plutarch's<sup>1</sup> heroes, three or four and twenty centuries ago. Not in time is the race progressive. Phocion,<sup>2</sup> Socrates, Anaxagoras,<sup>3</sup> Diogenes,<sup>4</sup> are great men, but they leave no class. He who is really of their class will not be called  
 15 by their name, but will be his own man, and, in his turn, the founder of a sect. The arts and inventions of each period are only its costume, and do not invigorate men. The harm of the improved machinery may compensate its good. Hudson<sup>5</sup> and Bering<sup>6</sup> accomplished so much in their fishing boats, as to astonish  
 20 Parry<sup>7</sup> and Franklin,<sup>8</sup> whose equipment exhausted the resources

<sup>1</sup> A Grecian philosopher living in the first century A.D. He was also a prolific writer. His most noted work is *Parallel Lives*, a series of forty-six biographies divided into pairs, one taken from Greek and one from Roman history, and each accompanied by a psychological and moral comparison between the characters described. <sup>2</sup> An Athenian general (402-317 B.C.).

<sup>3</sup> Eminent Greek philosopher (500-428 B.C.). He maintained the eternity of matter.

<sup>4</sup> A famous Greek cynic philosopher (412?-323? B.C.). He affected a contempt for the comforts of life and the customs of the world. According to tradition he lodged in a tub.

<sup>5</sup> Henry Hudson, distinguished English discoverer, discovered Hudson River and Hudson Bay.

<sup>6</sup> A Danish navigator (1680-1741). He discovered Bering Strait in 1728, and ascertained that Asia was not joined to America, as was formerly supposed.

<sup>7</sup> Sir William Edward Parry, English navigator (1790-1855). In 1819-23 he penetrated the Arctic regions farther than any previous explorer.

<sup>8</sup> Sir John Franklin (1786-1847), English Arctic explorer.

of science and art. Galileo, with an opera glass, discovered a more splendid series of celestial phenomena than any one since. Columbus<sup>1</sup> found the New World in an undecked boat. It is curious to see the periodical disuse and perishing of means and machinery, which were introduced with loud laudation a few 5 years or centuries before. The great genius returns to essential man. We reckoned the improvements of the art of war among the triumphs of science, and yet Napoleon<sup>2</sup> conquered Europe by the bivouac,<sup>3</sup> which consisted of falling back on naked valor, and disencumbering it of all aids. The Emperor held it impos- 10 sible to make a perfect army, says Las Casas,<sup>4</sup> "without abolishing our arms, magazines, commissaries, and carriages, until, in imitation of the Roman custom, the soldier should receive his supply of corn, grind it in his handmill, and bake his bread himself."

15

Society is a wave. The wave moves onward, but the water of which it is composed does not. The same particle does not rise from the valley to the ridge. Its unity is only phenomenal. The persons who make up a nation to-day, next year die, and their experience with them.

20

And so the reliance on Property, including the reliance on governments which protect it, is the want of self-reliance. Men have looked away from themselves and at things so long, that they have come to esteem the religious, learned, and civil institutions as guards of property, and they deprecate assaults on these, 25 because they feel them to be assaults on property. They measure their esteem of each other by what each has, and not by

1 Christopher Columbus (about 1436-1506), the discoverer of America.

2 See note 2, page 101.

3 An encampment of soldiers in the open air, without tents, each soldier remaining dressed, with his weapons at hand.

4 Emmanuel Augustin Dieudonné, Comte de las Cases (1766-1842); author of "*Mémorial de St. Hélène*," and a friend of Napoleon Bonaparte's. Note that Emerson's spelling of the name is wrong. He confused it with that of the great Bartolomé de las Casas, the Spanish missionary.



what each is. But a cultivated man becomes ashamed of his property, out of new respect for his nature. Especially he hates what he has, if he see that it is accidental,—came to him by inheritance, or gift, or crime; then he feels that it is not having; 5 it does not belong to him, has no root in him, and merely lies there, because no revolution or no robber takes it away. But that which a man is does always by necessity acquire,<sup>1</sup> and what the man acquires is living property, which does not wait the beck of rulers, or mobs, or revolutions, or fire, or storm, or 10 bankruptcies, but perpetually renews itself wherever the man breathes. “Thy lot or portion of life,” said the Caliph Ali,<sup>2</sup> “is seeking after thee; therefore be at rest from seeking after it.” Our dependence on these foreign goods leads us to our slavish respect for numbers. The political parties meet in numerous 15 conventions; the greater the concourse, and with each new uproar of announcement, The delegation from Essex! The Democrats from New Hampshire! The Whigs of Maine! The young patriot feels himself stronger than before by a new thousand of eyes and arms. In like manner the reformers summon 20 conventions, and vote and resolve in multitude. Not so, O friends! will the God deign to enter and inhabit you, but by a method precisely the reverse. It is only as a man puts off all foreign support, and stands alone, that I see him to be strong and to prevail. He is weaker by every recruit to his banner. Is 25 not a man better than a town? Ask nothing of men, and in the endless mutation, thou only firm column must presently appear the upholder of all that surrounds thee. He who knows that power is inborn, that he is weak because he has looked for good out of him and elsewhere, and so perceiving, throws himself 30 unhesitatingly on his thought, instantly rights himself, stands in the erect position, commands his limbs, works miracles; just

<sup>1</sup> Become his own.

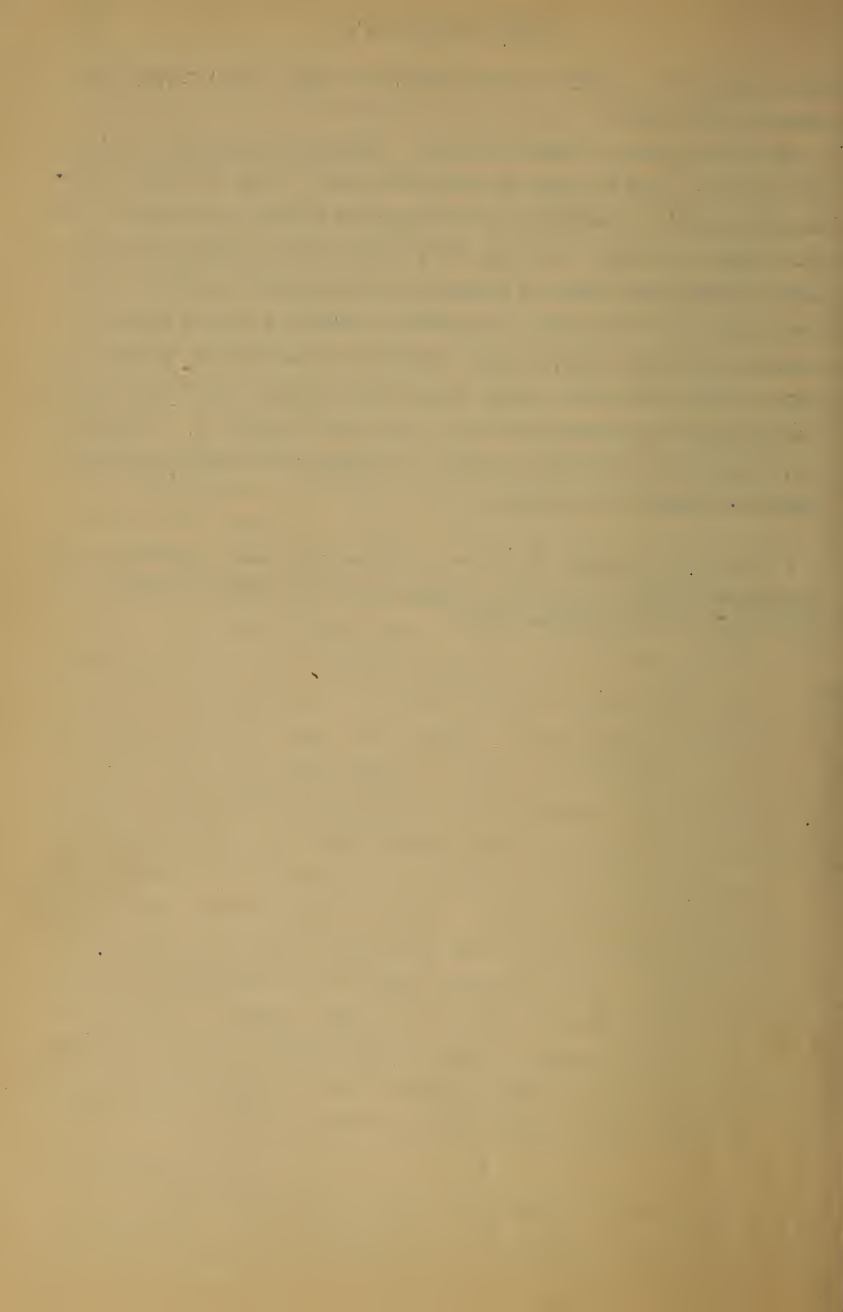
<sup>2</sup> An Arabian caliph, surnamed the “Lion of God,” a cousin and follower of Mohammed. He is distinguished as an author of many maxims and proverbs which have been handed down and published.



as a man who stands on his feet is stronger than a man who stands on his head.

So use all that is called Fortune. Most men gamble with her, and gain all, and lose all, as her wheel rolls. But do thou leave as unlawful these winnings, and deal with Cause and Effect, the 5 chancellors of God. In the Will work and acquire, and thou hast chained the wheel of Chance,<sup>1</sup> and shalt sit hereafter out of fear from her rotations. A political victory, a rise of rents, the recovery of your sick, or the return of your absent friend, or some other favorable event, raises your spirits, and you think 10 good days are preparing for you. Do not believe it. Nothing can bring you peace but yourself. Nothing can bring you peace but the triumph of principles.

<sup>1</sup> Fortuna, the goddess of fortune or chance in Roman mythology, was represented with her eyes bound, standing on a ball or wheel to indicate that luck rolls, like a ball, without choice.



## COMPENSATION.

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THE wings of Time are black and white,  
Pied <sup>1</sup> with morning and with night.  
Mountain tall and ocean deep  
Trembling balance duly keep.  
In changing moon, in tidal wave,  
Glowes the feud of Want and Have.  
Gauge of more and less through space  
Electric star and pencil plays.  
The lonely Earth amid the balls <sup>2</sup>  
That hurry through the eternal halls,<sup>3</sup>  
A makeweight <sup>4</sup> flying to the void,  
Supplemental asteroid,  
Or compensatory spark,  
Shoots across the neutral Dark.

<sup>1</sup> Spotted.

<sup>2</sup> Planets.

<sup>3</sup> Space.

<sup>4</sup> Something added to fill a deficiency.

Man's the elm, and Wealth the vine,  
Stanch and strong the tendrils twine :  
Though the frail ringlets thee deceive,  
None from its stock that vine can reave.<sup>1</sup>  
Fear not, then, thou child infirm,  
There's no god dare wrong a worm.  
Laurel crowns<sup>2</sup> cleave to deserts,  
And power to him who power exerts ;  
Hast not thy share? On winged feet,  
Lo ! it rushes thee to meet ;  
And all that Nature made thy own,  
Floating in air or pent<sup>3</sup> in stone,  
Will rive<sup>4</sup> the hills and swim the sea,  
And, like thy shadow, follow thee.

<sup>1</sup> Take away.

<sup>2</sup> Honors, from the custom of the ancient Greeks to use laurel crowns as a mark of honor.

<sup>3</sup> Confined.

<sup>4</sup> Rend asunder.

## COMPENSATION.

EVER since I was a boy, I have wished to write a discourse on Compensation: for it seemed to me when very young, that on this subject life was ahead of theology, and the people knew more than the preachers taught. The documents,<sup>1</sup> too, from which the doctrine is to be drawn, charmed my fancy by their endless variety, and lay always before me, even in sleep; for they are the tools in our hands, the bread in our basket, the transactions of the street, the farm, and the dwelling house, greetings, relations, debts and credits, the influence of character, the nature and endowment of all men. It seemed to me, also, that in it might be shown men a ray of divinity, the present action of the soul of this world, clean from all vestige of tradition, and so the heart of man might be bathed by an inundation of eternal love, conversing with that which he knows was always and always must be, because it really is now. It appeared, moreover, that if this doctrine could be stated in terms with any resemblance to those bright intuitions in which this truth is sometimes revealed to us, it would be a star<sup>2</sup> in many dark hours and crooked passages in our journey that would not suffer us to lose our way.

I was lately confirmed in these desires by hearing a sermon at church. The preacher, a man esteemed for his orthodoxy, unfolded in the ordinary manner the doctrine of the Last Judgment. He assumed, that judgment is not executed in this world; that the wicked are successful; that the good are miserable; and then urged from reason and from Scripture a compensation to

<sup>1</sup> Data.

<sup>2</sup> A guiding star; hence, guide.



be made to both parties in the next life. No offense appeared to be taken by the congregation at this doctrine. As far as I could observe, when the meeting broke up, they separated without remark on the sermon.

5 Yet what was the import<sup>1</sup> of this teaching? What did the preacher mean by saying that the good are miserable in the present life? Was it that houses and lands, offices, wine, horses, dress, luxury, are had<sup>2</sup> by unprincipled men, whilst the saints are poor and despised; and that a compensation is to be made to  
 10 these last hereafter, by giving them the like gratifications another day,—bank stock and doubloons,<sup>3</sup> venison and champagne? This must be the compensation intended; for what else? Is it that they are to have leave to pray and praise? to love and serve men? Why, that they can do now. The legitimate inference  
 15 the disciple would draw was,—“We are to have *such* a good time as the sinners have now;”—or, to push it to its extreme import,—“You sin now; we shall sin by and by; we would sin now, if we could; not being successful, we expect our revenge to-morrow.”

20 The fallacy lay in the immense concession, that the bad are successful; that justice is not done now. The blindness of the preacher consisted in deferring<sup>4</sup> to the base estimate of the market<sup>5</sup> of what constitutes a manly success, instead of confronting and convicting the world from the truth; announcing the  
 25 presence of the soul; the omnipotence of the will: and so establishing the standard of good and ill, of success and falsehood.

I find a similar base tone in the popular religious works of the day, and the same doctrines assumed by the literary men when  
 30 occasionally they treat the related topics. I think that our popular theology has gained in decorum, and not in principle, over the superstitions it has displaced. But men are better than this

<sup>1</sup> Meaning.

<sup>2</sup> Possessed.

<sup>3</sup> Spanish and Portuguese coins worth about \$15.60 each.

<sup>4</sup> Bowing to; accepting.

<sup>5</sup> Those engaged in commercial life.

theology. Their daily life gives it the lie.<sup>1</sup> Every ingenuous and aspiring soul leaves the doctrine behind him in his own experience; and all men feel sometimes the falsehood which they cannot demonstrate. For men are wiser than they know. That which they hear in schools and pulpits without afterthought, if said in conversation, would probably be questioned in silence. If a man dogmatize in a mixed company on Providence and the divine laws, he is answered by a silence which conveys well enough to an observer the dissatisfaction of the hearer, but his incapacity to make his own statement.

I shall attempt to record some facts that indicate the path of the law of Compensation; happy beyond my expectation, if I shall truly draw the smallest arc of this circle.

POLARITY,<sup>2</sup> or action and reaction, we meet in every part of nature; in darkness and light; in heat and cold; in the ebb and flow of waters; in male and female; in the inspiration and expiration of plants and animals; in the equation of quantity and quality in the fluids of the animal body; in the systole<sup>3</sup> and diastole<sup>4</sup> of the heart; in the undulations of fluids, and of sound; in the centrifugal<sup>5</sup> and centripetal<sup>6</sup> gravity; in electricity, galvanism, and chemical affinity. Superinduce<sup>7</sup> magnetism at one end of a needle; the opposite magnetism takes place at the other end. If the south attracts, the north repels. To empty here, you must condense there. An inevitable dualism bisects nature, so that each thing is a half, and suggests another thing to make it whole; as, spirit, matter; man, woman; odd, even; subjective, objective; in, out; upper, under; motion, rest; yea, nay.

Whilst the world is thus dual, so is every one of its parts. The

<sup>1</sup> Proves it false.

<sup>2</sup> See Note 3, p. 33.

<sup>3</sup> Contraction of the heart and arteries.

<sup>4</sup> Dilatation of the heart and arteries.

<sup>5</sup> Tending to recede from the center.

<sup>6</sup> Tending to move towards the center.

<sup>7</sup> Develop.

entire system of things gets represented in every particle. There is somewhat that resembles the ebb and flow of the sea, day and night, man and woman, in a single needle of the pine, in a kernel of corn, in each individual of every animal tribe. The reaction, 5 so grand in the elements, is repeated within these small boundaries. For example, in the animal kingdom the physiologist has observed that no creatures are favorites, but a certain compensation balances every gift and every defect. A surplusage<sup>1</sup> given to one part is paid out of a reduction from another part of the 10 same creature. If the head and neck are enlarged, the trunk and extremities are cut short.

The theory of the mechanic forces is another example. What we gain in power is lost in time; and the converse. The periodic or compensating errors of the planets is another instance. The 15 influences of climate and soil in political history is another. The cold climate invigorates. The barren soil does not breed fevers, crocodiles, tigers, or scorpions.

The same dualism underlies the nature and condition of man. Every excess causes a defect; every defect an excess. Every 20 sweet hath its sour; every evil its good. Every faculty which is a receiver of pleasure has an equal penalty put on its abuse. It is to answer for its moderation with its life. For every grain of wit there is a grain of folly. For everything you have missed, you have gained something else; and for everything you gain, 25 you lose something. If riches increase, they are increased<sup>2</sup> that use them. If the gatherer gathers too much, nature takes out of the man what she puts into his chest, swells the estate, but kills the owner. Nature hates monopolies and exceptions. The waves of the sea do not more speedily seek a level from their 30 loftiest tossing, than the varieties of condition tend to equalize themselves. There is always some leveling circumstance that puts down the overbearing, the strong, the rich, the fortunate, substantially on the same ground with all others. Is a man too

<sup>1</sup> Excess.

<sup>2</sup> That is, their needs or wants are increased.

strong and fierce for society, and by temper and position a bad citizen,—a morose ruffian, with a dash of the pirate in him?—nature sends him a troop of pretty sons and daughters, who are getting along in the dame's<sup>1</sup> classes at the village school, and love and fear for them smooths his grim scowl to courtesy. Thus <sup>5</sup> she contrives to intenerate<sup>2</sup> the granite and felspar, takes the boar out and puts the lamb in, and keeps her balance true.

The farmer imagines power and place are fine things. But the President has paid dear for his White House.<sup>3</sup> It has commonly cost him all his peace, and the best of his manly attri- <sup>10</sup> butes. To preserve for a short time so conspicuous an appearance before the world, he is content to eat dust<sup>4</sup> before the real masters who stand erect behind the throne. Or do men desire the more substantial and permanent grandeur of genius? Neither has this an immunity. He who by force of will or of thought is <sup>15</sup> great, and overlooks<sup>5</sup> thousands, has the charges of that eminence. With every influx of light comes new danger. Has he light? he must bear witness to the light, and always outrun that sympathy which gives him such keen satisfaction, by his fidelity to new revelations of the incessant soul. He must hate father <sup>20</sup> and mother, wife and child. Has he all that the world loves and admires and covets?—he must cast behind him their admiration, and afflict them by faithfulness to his truth, and become a byword and a hissing.

This law writes the laws of cities and nations. It is in vain <sup>25</sup> to build or plot or combine against it. Things refuse to be mismanaged long. *Res nolunt diu male administrari.*<sup>6</sup> Though no checks to a new evil appear, the checks exist, and will appear. If the government is cruel, the governor's life is not safe. If you tax too high, the revenue will yield nothing. If you make <sup>30</sup> the criminal code sanguinary, juries will not convict. If the law

<sup>1</sup> Schoolmistress.

<sup>2</sup> Soften.

<sup>3</sup> The official residence of the President in Washington.

<sup>4</sup> "Eat dust," i.e., humble himself. <sup>5</sup> Superintends.

<sup>6</sup> The Latin rendering of the sentence preceding.



is too mild, private vengeance comes in. If the government is a terrific democracy, the pressure is resisted by an overcharge of energy in the citizen, and life glows with a fiercer flame. The true life and satisfactions of man seem to elude the utmost rigors  
5 or felicities of condition, and to establish themselves with great indifference<sup>1</sup> under all varieties of circumstances. Under all governments the influence of character remains the same,—in Turkey and in New England about alike. Under the primeval despots of Egypt, history honestly confesses that man must have  
10 been as free as culture could make him.

These appearances indicate the fact that the universe is represented in every one of its particles. Everything in nature contains all the powers of nature. Everything is made of one hidden stuff; as the naturalist sees one type under every meta-  
15 morphosis, and regards a horse as a running man, a fish as a swimming man, a bird as a flying man, a tree as a rooted man. Each new form repeats not only the main character of the type, but part for part all the details, all the aims, furtherances,<sup>2</sup> hindrances, energies, and whole system of every other. Every oc-  
20 cupation, trade, art, transaction, is a compend of the world, and a correlative of every other. Each one is an entire emblem of human life; of its good and ill, its trials, its enemies, its course and its end. And each one must somehow accommodate the whole man, and recite all his destiny.

25 The world globes itself in a drop of dew.<sup>3</sup> The microscope cannot find the animalcule<sup>4</sup> which is less perfect for being little. Eyes, ears, taste, smell, motion, resistance, appetite, and organs of reproduction that take hold on eternity,—all find room to consist in the small creature. So do we put our life into every  
30 act. The true doctrine of omnipresence is, that God reappears with all his parts in every moss and cobweb. The value of the

<sup>1</sup> Impartiality.

<sup>2</sup> Things which help its progress.

<sup>3</sup> "The world," etc., i.e., the laws which make the world a globe give the same shape to a drop of dew.

<sup>4</sup> An animal so small as to be nearly or quite invisible to the naked eye.



universe contrives to throw itself into every point. If the good is there, so is the evil; if the affinity, so the repulsion; if the force, so the limitation.

Thus is the universe alive. All things are moral. That soul, which within us is a sentiment, outside of us is a law. We feel its inspiration; out there in history we can see its fatal strength. "It is in the world, and the world was made by it." Justice is not postponed. A perfect equity adjusts its balance in all parts of life. *Oi kýβοι Διὸς ἀεὶ εὐπίπτουσι*,<sup>1</sup>—The dice of God are always loaded.<sup>2</sup> The world looks like a multiplication table, or a mathematical equation, which, turn it how you will, balances itself. Take what figure you will, its exact value, nor<sup>3</sup> more nor less, still returns to you. Every secret is told, every crime is punished, every virtue rewarded, every wrong redressed, in silence and certainty. What we call retribution is the universal necessity by which the whole appears wherever a part appears. If you see smoke, there must be fire. If you see a hand or a limb, you know that the trunk to which it belongs is there behind.

Every act rewards itself, or, in other words, integrates itself, in a twofold manner; first, in the thing, or in real nature; and secondly, in the circumstance, or in apparent nature. Men call the circumstance the retribution. The causal retribution is in the thing, and is seen by the soul. The retribution in the circumstance is seen by the understanding; it is inseparable from the thing, but is often spread over a long time, and so does not become distinct until after many years. The specific stripes<sup>4</sup> may follow late after the offense, but they follow because they accompany it. Crime and punishment grow out of one stem. Punishment is a fruit that unsuspected ripens within the flower of the pleasure which concealed it. Cause and effect, means and ends,

<sup>1</sup> *Hoi kōō'boi Deōs ai ēpíptōsee*—the Greek of the sentence which follows.

<sup>2</sup> "The dice," etc., i.e., God does not play a game of chance.

<sup>3</sup> Neither.

<sup>4</sup> Blows made with a lash; hence, punishment.

seed and fruit, cannot be severed; for the effect already blooms in the cause, the end preëxists in the means, the fruit in the seed.

Whilst thus the world will be whole, and refuses to be divided,<sup>1</sup> we seek to act partially, to sunder, to appropriate; for example,—to gratify the senses, we sever the pleasure of the senses from the needs of the character. The ingenuity of man has always been dedicated to the solution of one problem,—how to detach the sensual sweet, the sensual strong, the sensual bright, etc., from the moral sweet, the moral deep, the moral fair; that is, again, to contrive to cut clean off this upper surface so thin as to leave it bottomless; to get a *one end*, without an *other end*. The soul says, Eat; the body would feast. The soul says, The man and woman shall be one flesh and one soul; the body would join the flesh only. The soul says, Have dominion over all things to the ends of virtue; the body would have the power over things to its own ends.

The soul strives amain<sup>2</sup> to live and work through all things. It would be the only fact. All things shall be added unto it,—power, pleasure, knowledge, beauty. The particular man aims to be somebody; to set up for himself; to truck and higgler for a private good; and, in particulars, to ride, that he may ride; to dress, that he may be dressed; to eat, that he may eat; and to govern, that he may be seen. Men seek to be great; they would have offices, wealth, power, and fame. They think that to be great is to possess one side of nature,—the sweet, without the other side,—the bitter.

This dividing and detaching is steadily counteracted. Up to this day, it must be owned, no projector has had the smallest success. The parted water reunites behind our hand. Pleasure is taken out of pleasant things, profit out of profitable things, power out of strong things, as soon as we seek to separate them from the whole. We can no more halve things and get the sensual

<sup>1</sup> Divided.

<sup>2</sup> Vigorously.

good, by itself, than we can get an inside that shall have no outside, or a light without a shadow. "Drive out nature with a fork, she comes running back."<sup>1</sup>

Life invests itself with inevitable conditions, which the unwise seek to dodge, which one and another brags that he does not know; that they do not touch him;—but the brag is on his lips, the conditions are in his soul. If he escapes them in one part, they attack him in another more vital part. If he has escaped them in form, and in the appearance, it is because he has resisted his life, and fled from himself, and the retribution is so much death. So signal is the failure of all attempts to make this separation of the good from the bad, that the experiment would not be tried,—since to try it is to be mad,—but for the circumstance, that when the disease began in the will, of rebellion and separation, the intellect is at once infected, so that the man ceases to see God whole in each object, but is able to see the sensual allurements of an object, and not see the sensual hurt; he sees the mermaid's<sup>2</sup> head, but not the dragon's tail; and thinks he can cut off that which he would have, from that which he would not have. "How secret art thou who dwellest in the highest heavens in silence, O thou only great God, sprinkling with an unwearied providence certain penal blindnesses upon such as have unbridled desires!"<sup>3</sup>

The human soul is true to these facts in the painting of fable, of history, of law, of proverbs, of conversation. It finds a tongue in literature unawares. Thus the Greeks called Jupiter,<sup>4</sup> Supreme Mind; but having traditionally ascribed to him many base actions, they involuntarily made amends to reason, by tying up the hands<sup>5</sup> of so bad a god. He is made as helpless as a king of

<sup>1</sup> A proverb, quoted by Horace, the origin of which is lost in antiquity.

<sup>2</sup> A fabled marine being, represented as having the upper part of the body like a woman and the lower part like a fish, serpent, or dragon.

<sup>3</sup> St. Augustine, Confessions, Book I.

<sup>4</sup> Jupiter, Jove, or Zeus, the supreme god of the Greeks and Romans.

<sup>5</sup> Limiting the power.

England.<sup>1</sup> Prometheus<sup>2</sup> knows one secret which Jove must bargain for; Minerva,<sup>3</sup> another. He cannot get his own thunders; Minerva keeps the key of them.

“Of all the gods, I only know the keys  
That ope the solid doors within whose vaults  
His thunders sleep.”

A plain confession of the in-working of the All, and of its moral aim. The Indian mythology ends in the same ethics; and it would seem impossible for any fable to be invented and  
10 get any currency which was not moral. Aurora<sup>4</sup> forgot to ask youth for her lover, and though Tithonus is immortal, he is old. Achilles<sup>5</sup> is not quite invulnerable; the sacred waters did not wash the heel by which Thetis held him. Siegfried,<sup>6</sup> in the

<sup>1</sup> Parliament has supreme power in England.

<sup>2</sup> Prometheus, in Greek mythology the regenerator of mankind, used knowledge as a weapon to defeat evil. He stole Jupiter's fire and taught mortals how to use it. Jupiter punished him by chaining him to a rock where he was tortured by an eagle. There was a prophecy afloat in heaven portending the fall of Jupiter, and only Prometheus knew the secret of averting it. Jupiter offered him his freedom if he would reveal it. For a long time he steadfastly refused, and endured untold tortures; but at length, according to some traditions, he revealed the secret that if Jupiter became the father of a son by Thetis, that son would deprive him of his sovereignty. Prometheus was thereupon set free. According to another story he never divulged the secret, but was at length released by Hercules, who killed the eagle.

<sup>3</sup> Minerva, Athena, or Pallas, a goddess in Greek and Roman mythology, who sprang full-armed from the head of her father Jupiter. She was the goddess of wisdom and of war, and sometimes wielded Jupiter's thunderbolts.

<sup>4</sup> Aurora, Roman goddess of the dawn, became enamored of Tithonus, son of Laomedon, King of Troy. She stole him away and persuaded Jupiter to grant him immortality, but she forgot to have youth added to the gift, and soon began to discern that he was growing old. She grew angry at this and finally turned him into a grasshopper.

<sup>5</sup> Achilles is the hero of the Iliad, Homer's great epic. His mother, Thetis, dipped him in the river Styx to render him immortal.

<sup>6</sup> The Nibelungenlied is the great epic poem of the old Germans, as the



Nibelungen, is not quite immortal, for a leaf fell on his back whilst he was bathing in the dragon's blood, and that spot which it covered is mortal. And so it must be. There is a crack in everything God has made. It would seem, there is always this vindictive circumstance stealing in at unawares, even into the 5 wild poesy in which the human fancy attempted to make bold holiday, and to shake itself free of the old laws,—this back-stroke, this kick of the gun, certifying that the law is fatal; that in nature nothing can be given, all things are sold.

This is that ancient doctrine of Nemesis,<sup>1</sup> who keeps watch in 10 the universe, and lets no offense go unchastised. The Furies,<sup>2</sup> they said, are attendants on justice, and if the sun in heaven should transgress his path, they would punish him. The poets related that stone walls, and iron swords, and leathern thongs had an occult sympathy with the wrongs of their owners; that the 15 belt which Ajax gave Hector dragged the Trojan hero over the field at the wheels of the car of Achilles, and the sword which Hector gave Ajax was that on whose point Ajax<sup>3</sup> fell. They recorded, that when the Thasians erected a statue to Theagenes,<sup>4</sup> a victor in the games, one of his rivals went to it by night, and en- 20 deavored to throw it down by repeated blows, until at last he moved it from its pedestal, and was crushed to death beneath its fall.

Iliad is of the ancient Greeks. Siegfried is the mythical hero of the former as Achilles is of the latter story.

<sup>1</sup> In Greek mythology, a goddess personifying moral reverence for law. She visited the righteous anger of the gods upon the proud and insolent.

<sup>2</sup> The Furies were three mythological deities, Alecto, Tisiphone, and Megæra, who punished crimes by their secret stings.

<sup>3</sup> Ajax and Hector are mythological heroes in the Trojan War as related in the Iliad, the former a Greek and the latter a Trojan. After a personal combat, they exchanged arms, and when subsequently Ajax committed suicide, he used the sword which had been Hector's, and when Achilles killed Hector, he used the belt which had belonged to Ajax to fasten the corpse to his chariot or car.

<sup>4</sup> See Pausanias's Description of Greece, Book VI, line 11. Theagenes, an inhabitant of Thasos, an island in the Ægean Sea, was renowned for his strength and swiftness and his numerous victories in athletic contests.



This voice of fable has in it somewhat divine. It came from thought above the will of the writer. That is the best part of each writer, which has nothing private in it; that which he does not know, that which flowed out of his constitution, and not  
 5 from his too active invention; that which in the study of a single artist you might not easily find, but in the study of many, you would abstract as the spirit of them all. Phidias<sup>1</sup> it is not, but the work of man in that early Hellenic<sup>2</sup> world, that I would know. The name and circumstance of Phidias, however con-  
 10 venient for history, embarrass when we come to the highest criticism. We are to see that which man was tending to do in a given period, and was hindered, or, if you will, modified in doing, by the interfering volitions of Phidias, of Dante,<sup>3</sup> of Shakespeare,<sup>4</sup> the organ whereby man at the moment wrought.

15 Still more striking is the expression of this fact in the proverbs of all nations, which are always the literature of reason, or the statements of an absolute truth, without qualification. Proverbs, like the sacred books of each nation, are the sanctuary of the intuitions. That which the droning world, chained to appearances,  
 20 will not allow the realist to say in his own words, it will suffer him to say in proverbs without contradiction. And this law of laws which the pulpit, the senate, and the college deny, is hourly preached in all markets and workshops by flights of proverbs, whose teaching is as true and as omnipresent as that of birds  
 25 and flies.

All things are double, one against another.—Tit for tat; an eye for an eye; a tooth for a tooth; blood for blood; measure for measure; love for love.—Give and it shall be given you.—He that watereth shall be watered himself.—What will you have?  
 30 quoth God; pay for it and take it.—Nothing venture, nothing have.—Thou shalt be paid exactly for what thou hast done, no more, no less.—Who doth not work shall not eat.—Harm watch, harm catch.—Curses always recoil on the head of him

<sup>1</sup> See Note 4, p. 76.

<sup>2</sup> Greek.

<sup>3</sup> See Note 6, p. 76.

<sup>4</sup> See Note 3, p. 29.

who imprecates them.—If you put a chain around the neck of a slave, the other end fastens itself around your own.—Bad counsel confounds the adviser.—The Devil is an ass.

It is thus written, because it is thus in life. Our action is overmastered and characterized above our will by the law of <sup>5</sup> nature. We aim at a petty end quite aside from the public good, but our act arranges itself by irresistible magnetism in a line with the poles of the world.

A man cannot speak, but he judges himself. With his will, or against his will, he draws his portrait to the eye of his compan- <sup>10</sup> ions by every word. Every opinion reacts on him who utters it. It is a thread-ball<sup>1</sup> thrown at a mark, but the other end remains in the thrower's bag. Or, rather, it is a harpoon hurled at the whale, unwinding, as it flies, a coil of cord in the boat, and if the harpoon is not good, or not well thrown, it will go nigh to <sup>15</sup> cut the steersman in twain, or to sink the boat.

You cannot do wrong without suffering wrong. "No man had ever a point of pride that was not injurious to him," said Burke.<sup>2</sup> The exclusive in fashionable life does not see that he excludes himself from enjoyment, in the attempt to appropriate <sup>20</sup> it. The exclusionist in religion does not see that he shuts the door of heaven on himself, in striving to shut out others. Treat men as pawns<sup>3</sup> and ninepins, and you shall suffer as well as they. If you leave out their heart, you shall lose your own. The senses would make things of all persons; of women, of children, of <sup>25</sup> the poor. The vulgar proverb, "I will get it from his purse or get it from his skin," is sound philosophy.

All infractions of love and equity in our social relations are speedily punished. They are punished by fear. Whilst I stand

<sup>1</sup> A ball of thread.

<sup>2</sup> Edmund Burke (1729-97), Irish statesman, orator, and political writer. His best known works are his *Speech on American Conciliation* and *Reflections on the French Revolution*.

<sup>3</sup> A piece of lowest rank in the game of chess; hence, a mere figure to be moved about at the will of another.

in simple relations to my fellow-man, I have no displeasure in meeting him. We meet as water meets water, or as two currents of air mix, with perfect diffusion and interpenetration<sup>1</sup> of nature. But as soon as there is any departure from simplicity, and attempt  
5 at halfness, or good for me that is not good for him, my neighbor feels the wrong; he shrinks from me as far as I have shrunk from him; his eyes no longer seek mine; there is war between us; there is hate in him and fear in me.

All the old abuses in society, universal and particular, all un-  
10 just accumulations of property and power, are avenged in the same manner. Fear is an instructor of great sagacity, and the herald of all revolutions. One thing he teaches, that there is rottenness where he appears. He is a carrion crow, and though you see not well what he hovers for, there is death somewhere.  
15 Our property is timid, our laws are timid, our cultivated classes are timid. Fear for ages has boded and mowed and gibbered<sup>2</sup> over government and property. That obscene<sup>3</sup> bird is not there for nothing. He indicates great wrongs which must be revised.

20 Of the like nature is that expectation of change which instantly follows the suspension of our voluntary activity. The terror of cloudless noon, the emerald of Polycrates,<sup>4</sup> the awe of prosperity, the instinct which leads every generous soul to impose on itself tasks of a noble asceticism and vicarious virtue, are the  
25 tremblings of the balance of justice through the heart and mind of man.

<sup>1</sup> A penetrating between other substances.

<sup>2</sup> "Fear," etc., i.e., fear has presaged evil, made faces, and spoken incoherently.

<sup>3</sup> Ill-omened.

<sup>4</sup> Polycrates, a celebrated Greek tyrant of Samos, had such unvarying good fortune that he was counseled to cast from him that which he valued most in order to allay the jealousy of the gods. Accordingly he threw into the sea an emerald ring of extraordinary beauty; but in a few days he regained it from inside a fish presented to him by a fisherman. Soon after this Polycrates' prosperity deserted him and he suffered an ignominious death on the cross.

Experienced men of the world know very well that it is best to pay scot and lot<sup>1</sup> as they go along, and that a man often pays dear for a small frugality. The borrower runs in his own debt. Has a man gained anything who has received a hundred favors and rendered none? Has he gained by borrowing, through indolence or cunning, his neighbor's wares, or horses, or money? There arises on the deed the instant acknowledgment of benefit on the one part, and of debt on the other; that is, of superiority and inferiority. The transaction remains in the memory of himself and his neighbor; and every new transaction alters, according to its nature, their relation to each other. He may soon come to see that he had better have broken his own bones than to have ridden in his neighbor's coach, and that "the highest price he can pay for a thing is to ask for it."

A wise man will extend this lesson to all parts of life, and know that it is the part of prudence to face every claimant, and pay every just demand on your time, your talents, or your heart. Always pay; for, first or last, you must pay your entire debt. Persons and events may stand for a time between you and justice, but it is only a postponement. You must pay at last your own debt. If you are wise, you will dread a prosperity which only loads you with more. Benefit is the end of nature. But for every benefit which you receive, a tax is levied. He is great who confers the most benefits. He is base—and that is the one base thing in the universe—to receive favors and render none. In the order of nature we cannot render benefits to those from whom we receive them, or only seldom. But the benefit we receive must be rendered again, line for line, deed for deed, cent for cent, to somebody. Beware of too much good staying in your hand. It will fast corrupt and worm<sup>2</sup> worms. Pay it away quickly in some sort.<sup>3</sup>

Labor is watched over by the same pitiless laws. Cheapest,

<sup>1</sup> Scot and lot, formerly a parish assessment laid on subjects according to their ability.

<sup>2</sup> Beget.

<sup>3</sup> Manner.



say the prudent, is the dearest labor. What we buy in a broom, a mat, a wagon, a knife, is some application of good sense to a common want. It is best to pay in your land a skillful gardener, or to buy good sense applied to gardening; in your sailor, good sense applied to navigation; in the house, good sense applied to cooking, sewing, serving; in your agent, good sense applied to accounts and affairs. So do you multiply your presence, or spread yourself throughout your estate. But because of the dual constitution of things, in labor as in life there can be no cheating. The thief steals from himself. The swindler swindles himself. For the real price of labor is knowledge and virtue, whereof wealth and credit are signs. These signs, like paper money, may be counterfeited or stolen, but that which they represent, namely, knowledge and virtue, cannot be counterfeited or stolen. These ends of labor cannot be answered but by real exertions of the mind, and in obedience to pure motives. The cheat, the defaulter, the gambler, cannot extort the knowledge of material and moral nature which his honest care and pains yield to the operative. The law of nature is, Do the thing, and you shall have the power: but they who do not the thing have not the power.

Human labor, through all its forms, from the sharpening of a stake to the construction of a city or an epic, is one immense illustration of the perfect compensation of the universe. The absolute balance of Give and Take, the doctrine that everything has its price,—and if that price is not paid, not that thing but something else is obtained, and that it is impossible to get anything without its price,—is not less sublime in the columns of a ledger than in the budgets of states, in the laws of light and darkness, in all the action and reaction of nature. I cannot doubt that the high laws which each man sees implicated in those processes with which he is conversant, the stern ethics which sparkle on his chisel edge, which are measured out by his plumb and foot rule, which stand as manifest in the footing of the shop bill as in the history of a state,—do recommend to him his trade, and though seldom named, exalt his business to his imagination.



The league between virtue and nature engages all things to assume a hostile front to vice. The beautiful laws and substances of the world persecute and whip the traitor. He finds that things are arranged for truth and benefit, but there is no den in the wide world to hide a rogue. Commit a crime, and the earth is made of glass.<sup>1</sup> Commit a crime, and it seems as if a coat of snow fell on the ground, such as reveals in the woods the track of every partridge and fox and squirrel and mole. You cannot recall the spoken word, you cannot wipe out the foot-track, you cannot draw up the ladder, so as to leave no inlet or clew. Some damning circumstance always transpires. The laws and substances of nature — water, snow, wind, gravitation — become penalties to the thief.

On the other hand, the law holds with equal sureness for all right action. Love, and you shall be loved. All love is mathematically just, as much as the two sides of an algebraic equation. The good man has absolute good, which like fire turns everything to its own nature, so that you cannot do him any harm; but as the royal armies sent against Napoleon,<sup>2</sup> when he approached, cast down their colors and from enemies became friends, so disasters of all kinds, as sickness, offense, poverty, prove benefactors: —

“Winds blow and waters roll  
Strength to the brave, and power and deity,  
Yet in themselves are nothing.”

25

The good are befriended even by weakness and defect. As no man had ever a point of pride that was not injurious to him, so no man had ever a defect that was not somewhere made useful

<sup>1</sup> There is no place where you can hide; every spot will be transparent.

<sup>2</sup> Napoleon Bonaparte (1769–1821), Emperor of France. For many years he was one of the most successful generals the world has ever seen, and he seemed destined to conquer the whole of Europe, but was finally defeated at Waterloo by the English and Prussians, and exiled to St. Helena, where he died.

to him. The stag in the fable<sup>1</sup> admired his horns and blamed his feet, but when the hunter came, his feet saved him, and afterwards, caught in the thicket, his horns destroyed him. Every man in his lifetime needs to thank his faults. As no man thoroughly understands a truth until he has contended against it, so no man has a thorough acquaintance with the hindrances or talents of men, until he has suffered from the one, and seen the triumph of the other over his own want of the same. Has he a defect of temper that unfits him to live in society? Thereby he is driven to entertain himself alone, and acquire habits of self-help; and thus, like the wounded oyster, he mends his shell with pearl.

Our strength grows out of our weakness. The indignation which arms itself with secret forces does not awaken until we are pricked and stung and sorely assailed. A great man is always willing to be little. Whilst he sits on the cushion of advantages, he goes to sleep. When he is pushed, tormented, defeated, he has a chance to learn something; he has been put on his wits, on his manhood; he has gained facts; learns his ignorance; is cured of the insanity of conceit; has got moderation and real skill. The wise man throws himself on the side of his assailants. It is more his interest than it is theirs to find his weak point. The wound cicatrizes<sup>2</sup> and falls off from him like a dead skin, and when they would triumph, lo! he has passed on invulnerable. Blame is safer than praise. I hate to be defended in a newspaper. As long as all that is said is said against me, I feel a certain assurance of success. But as soon as honeyed words of praise are spoken for me, I feel as one that lies unprotected before his enemies. In general, every evil to which we do not succumb is a benefactor. As the Sandwich Islander believes that the strength and valor of the enemy he kills passes into himself, so we gain the strength of the temptation we resist.

<sup>1</sup> One of Æsop's fables.

<sup>2</sup> Heals by forming a skin over dead flesh.

The same guards which protect us from disaster, defect, and enmity, defend us, if we will, from selfishness and fraud. Bolts and bars are not the best of our institutions, nor is shrewdness in trade a mark of wisdom. Men suffer all their life long, under the foolish superstition that they can be cheated. But it is as impossible for a man to be cheated by any one but himself, as for a thing to be and not to be at the same time. There is a third silent party to all our bargains. The nature and soul of things takes on itself the guaranty of the fulfillment of every contract, so that honest service cannot come to loss. If you serve an ungrateful master, serve him the more. Put God in your debt. Every stroke shall be repaid. The longer the payment is withholden,<sup>1</sup> the better for you; for compound interest on compound interest is the rate and usage of this exchequer.<sup>2</sup>

The history of persecution is a history of endeavors to cheat nature, to make water run up hill, to twist a rope of sand. It makes no difference whether the actors be many or one, a tyrant or a mob. A mob is a society of bodies voluntarily bereaving themselves of reason, and traversing its work. The mob is man voluntarily descending to the nature of the beast. Its fit hour of activity is night. Its actions are insane like its whole constitution. It persecutes a principle; it would whip a right; it would tar and feather justice, by inflicting fire and outrage upon the houses and persons of those who have these. It resembles the prank of boys, who run with fire engines to put out the ruddy aurora streaming to the stars. The inviolate spirit turns their spite against the wrongdoers. The martyr cannot be dishonored. Every lash inflicted is a tongue of fame; every prison, a more illustrious abode; every burned book or house enlightens the world; every suppressed or expunged word reverberates through the earth from side to side. Hours of sanity and consideration are always arriving to communities, as to individuals, when the truth is seen, and the martyrs are justified.

<sup>1</sup> Old form of "withheld."

<sup>2</sup> Treasury.

Thus do all things preach the indifferency of circumstances. The man is all. Everything has two sides, a good and an evil. Every advantage has its tax. I learn to be content. But the doctrine of compensation is not the doctrine of indifferency. The  
5 thoughtless say, on hearing these representations, — What boots<sup>1</sup> it to do well? there is one event to good and evil; if I gain any good, I must pay for it; if I lose any good, I gain some other; all actions are indifferent.

There is a deeper fact in the soul than compensation, to wit,  
10 its own nature. The soul is not a compensation, but a life. The soul *is*. Under all this running sea of circumstance, whose waters ebb and flow with perfect balance, lies the aboriginal<sup>2</sup> abyss of real Being. Essence, or God, is not a relation, or a part, but the whole. Being is the vast affirmative, excluding  
15 negation, self-balanced, and swallowing up all relations, parts, and times within itself. Nature, truth, virtue, are the influx from thence. Vice is the absence or departure of the same. Nothing, Falsehood, may indeed stand as the great Night or shade, on which, as a background, the living universe paints itself forth, but  
20 no fact is begotten by it; it cannot work; for it is not. It cannot work any good; it cannot work any harm. It is harm inasmuch as it is worse not to be than to be.

We feel defrauded of the retribution due to evil acts, because the criminal adheres to his vice and contumacy, and does not  
25 come to a crisis or judgment anywhere in visible nature. There is no stunning confutation of his nonsense before men and angels. Has he therefore outwitted the law? Inasmuch as he carries the malignity and the lie with him, he so far deceases from nature. In some manner there will be a demonstration of the  
30 wrong to the understanding also; but should we not see it, this deadly deduction makes square the eternal account.

Neither can it be said, on the other hand, that the gain of rectitude must be bought by any loss. There is no penalty to virtue; no penalty to wisdom; they are proper additions of

1 Profits.

2 See Note 2, p. 63.



being. In a virtuous action, I properly *am*; in a virtuous act, I add to the world; I plant into deserts conquered from Chaos and Nothing, and see the darkness receding on the limits of the horizon. There can be no excess to love; none to knowledge; none to beauty, when these attributes are considered in the purest sense. The soul refuses limits, and always affirms an Optimism,<sup>1</sup> never a Pessimism.

His life is a progress, and not a station. His instinct is trust. Our instinct uses "more" and "less" in application to man, of the *presence of the soul*, and not of its absence; the brave man is greater than the coward; the true, the benevolent, the wise, is more a man, and not less, than the fool and knave. There is no tax on the good of virtue; for that is the incoming of God himself, or absolute existence without any comparative. Material good has its tax, and if it came without desert or sweat, has no root in me, and the next wind will blow it away. But all the good of nature is the soul's, and may be had, if paid for in nature's lawful coin, that is, by labor which the heart and the head allow. I no longer wish to meet<sup>2</sup> a good I do not earn, for example, to find a pot of buried gold, knowing that it brings with it new burdens. I do not wish more external goods,—neither possessions, nor honors, nor powers, nor persons. The gain is apparent; the tax is certain. But there is no tax on the knowledge that the compensation exists, and that it is not desirable to dig up treasure. Herein I rejoice with a serene eternal peace. I do not contract the boundaries of possible mischief. I learn the wisdom of St. Bernard,<sup>3</sup>—"Nothing can work me damage except myself; the harm that I sustain I carry about with me, and never am a real sufferer but by my own fault."

In the nature of the soul is the compensation for the inequality

<sup>1</sup> The doctrine that everything in nature is ordered for the best. Pessimism is the reverse.

<sup>2</sup> To receive, or have bestowed on me.

<sup>3</sup> St. Bernard of Clairvaux, France (1091-1153), one of the most influential theologians of the middle ages.



ties of condition. The radical tragedy of nature seems to be the distinction of More and Less. How can Less not feel the pain; how not feel indignation or malevolence towards More? Look at those who have less faculty, and one feels sad, and knows not  
5 well what to make of it. He almost shuns their eye; he fears they will upbraid God. What should they do? It seems a great injustice. But see the facts nearly, and these mountainous inequalities vanish. Love reduces them, as the sun melts the iceberg in the sea. The heart and soul of all men being one,  
10 this bitterness of *His* and *Mine* ceases. His is mine. I am my brother, and my brother is me. If I feel overshadowed and outdone by great neighbors, I can yet love; I can still receive; and he that loveth maketh his own the grandeur he loves. Thereby I make the discovery that my brother is my guardian, acting for  
15 me with the friendliest designs, and the estate I so admired and envied is my own. It is the nature of the soul to appropriate all things. Jesus and Shakespeare are fragments of the soul, and by love I conquer and incorporate them in my own conscious domain. His virtue,—is not that mine? His wit,—if it cannot  
20 be made mine, it is not wit.

Such, also, is the natural history of calamity. The changes which break up at short intervals the prosperity of men are advertisements of a nature whose law is growth. Every soul is by this intrinsic necessity quitting its whole system of things, its  
25 friends, and home, and laws, and faith, as the shellfish crawls out of its beautiful but stony case, because it no longer admits of its growth, and slowly forms a new house. In proportion to the vigor of the individual, these revolutions are frequent, until in some happier mind they are incessant, and all worldly relations  
30 hang very loosely about him, becoming, as it were, a transparent fluid membrane through which the living form is seen, and not, as in most men, an indurated<sup>1</sup> heterogeneous<sup>2</sup> fabric of many dates, and of no settled character, in which the man is imprisoned. Then there can be enlargement, and the man of to-day scarcely

<sup>1</sup> Hardened.

<sup>2</sup> Composed of differing things.

recognizes the man of yesterday. And such should be the outward biography of man in time, a putting off of dead circumstances day by day, as he renews his raiment day by day. But to us, in our lapsed estate, resting, not advancing, resisting, not coöperating with the divine expansion, this growth comes by shocks.

We cannot part with our friends. We cannot let our angels go. We do not see that they only go out, that archangels may come in. We are idolaters of the old. We do not believe in the riches of the soul, in its proper eternity and omnipresence. We do not believe there is any force in to-day to rival or recreate<sup>1</sup> that beautiful yesterday. We linger in the ruins of the old tent, where once we had bread and shelter and organs, nor believe that the spirit can feed, cover, and nerve us again. We cannot again find aught so dear, so sweet, so graceful. But we sit and weep in vain. The voice of the Almighty saith, "Up and onward forevermore!" We cannot stay amid the ruins. Neither will we rely on the new; and so we walk ever with reverted eyes, like those monsters who look backwards.

And yet the compensations of calamity are made apparent to the understanding also, after long intervals of time. A fever, a mutilation, a cruel disappointment, a loss of wealth, a loss of friends, seems at the moment unpaid loss, and unpayable. But the sure years reveal the deep remedial force that underlies all facts. The death of a dear friend, wife, brother, lover, which seemed nothing but privation, somewhat later assumes the aspect of a guide or genius; for it commonly operates revolutions in our way of life, terminates an epoch of infancy or of youth which was waiting to be closed, breaks up a wonted<sup>2</sup> occupation, or a household, or style of living, and allows the formation of new ones more friendly to the growth of character. It permits or constrains the formation of new acquaintances, and the reception of new influences that prove of the first importance to the next years; and the man or woman who would have remained a

<sup>1</sup> Create again.

<sup>2</sup> Customary.

sunny garden flower, with no room for its roots and too much sunshine for its head, by the falling of the walls and the neglect of the gardener, is made the banian<sup>1</sup> of the forest, yielding shade and fruit to wide neighborhoods of men.

<sup>1</sup> Banyan, an East Indian tree of the mulberry family. Aërial roots descending from the branches become fixed in the ground, and thicken into supports or pillars. Thus the branches spread over an immense area, and a single tree has the appearance of a whole grove.

## NOTES AND SUGGESTIONS FOR STUDY.

IN most cases all the reading of any author that the average student has time for in his school course can serve only to set him on his way to some of the vast treasure houses of wisdom and satisfaction, and to stimulate his desire to explore still further the paths on which he has been started. The portion of an author's work best fitted for this beginning, then, is that which will make the way seem most attractive, and will present the most faithful and the most inspiring picture of the goal of the pilgrimage. This is particularly true of a philosophical essayist like Emerson. So, in selecting the essays for this little volume from the great wealth of material open to the student of Emerson, two ideas have been uppermost in mind: first, to choose those that experience has shown to possess the most immediate appeal to young people; and second, to include those that most simply present the fundamental ideas that pervade all of Emerson's writing; for as "Man and Nature are one," so is Emerson's thought about man, and nature, and life, under whatever title it may appear.

The problems confronting the more or less immature pupil as he first grapples with this thought are many; but paramount in importance and in difficulty, perhaps, are, first, the task of interpreting Emerson's thought into the pupil's own experience and interests; and second, the necessity which rests upon the pupil of learning to think, not with the author, but for himself. The way to each of these ends must be found largely by the individual pupil following and coöperating with the suggestions of the resourceful teacher. The introduction, notes, and questions accompanying the selections from the essays, however, are designed to suggest some of the ways in which a beginning may be made.

It is a popular assumption that secondary school pupils cannot or, at any rate, do not think. The successful teacher and the average



student know, however, that pupils are willing and ready to think, so far as their minds can range, about things that come within their realm of interests. In this respect they are about like the rest of us. As thinkers they differ from Emerson primarily in their range of interests.

Manifestly then the first thing for the pupil to do as he approaches the study of Emerson is to endeavor under the inspiration of his teacher to enlarge his horizon to take in the author's interests, and to strive to see clearly how Emerson's seemingly remote philosophy lights up the borderland of schoolboy thought, because to Emerson everything, "the shop, the plow, and the leger," are phases of the "like cause by which light undulates and poets sing," and "one design unites and animates the farthest pinnacle and the lowest trench." This is the difficult task. The soil is hard and the hand of the tiller often unskilled, but the seed is virile and of long life, and the harvest will come in good time.

To secure this first common ground of interest, in the case of Emerson where personality is so large a factor, the pupil should first, perhaps, come to understand something of the man himself with the emphasis upon the things that appeal to youth. Emerson's life is rather barren of incident, but there are compelling qualities of character that will arouse enthusiasm. His firm independence, his belief in himself, his "optimistic Americanism," his lofty idealism, his convincing sincerity, are traits that may serve as stepping-stones to the phases of his thought to which they lead. Emerson's presentation of "The American Scholar" as a man of action, instead of a recluse, offers a vantage ground from which many excursions into his philosophy may be made. The group of questions and topics accompanying each essay may be suggestive of some of the fields into which the student's thought may be turned. But first and always the pupil must feel that though the notes and the teacher may be of service at the outset, they are only media of communication between his mind and the great source of power that lies in Emerson's thought.

The second main thought always to be kept in mind is that the pupil should become, "not the parrot of other men's thinking," but "Man thinking." This is the end and consummation of the first, and follows it more readily than we sometimes believe. Whether Emerson's ideas arouse sympathy or antagonism in the mind of the



pupil, matters little. If the effort to transform what Emerson liked to call "the energy of ideas" or "ecstasy" into energy that can be used by the mind of the pupil has been successful, the reaction in thought is secured; for, as Professor Woodberry says, "No man rises from reading him without feeling more unshackled." Then the

"compensatory spark  
Shoots across the neutral Dark,"

and the energy imparted may be left to seek its expression in a life of action.

The exact method of studying the essays will always vary with the varying conditions of maturity of pupils, time, resources for collateral reading, and the tastes of teacher and pupil. In some respects the study of the essay is less difficult than the reading of other forms of literary work. The essay makes its appeal to the understanding rather than to the imagination, to the emotions, or to the artistic taste. It is generally practical in its nature. On the other hand, however, it does not possess the compelling interest of plot, as in the novel, or the fascination of character study, as in the drama. It often, also, deals with topics not inherently interesting to the average boy or girl. For these reasons, then, it is especially necessary that the student approach the reading with the sincere conviction that there is something in the essay well worth his while, and with an earnest purpose to find out what that something is. Here, care and skill in planning the preliminary work and good judgment in deciding how thoroughly the essay is to be mastered and just what parts may best be passed rapidly, are all important; and the student should respond readily to the suggestions of the teacher.

With most of Emerson's essays it is doubtful if the average pupil can be turned loose to make the first reading as a whole for himself, as can be done in the case of the essays of Addison or of Irving. Many would fail to get the thought and so acquire at the outset a distaste for the author and his topic, which it would be hard for the most enthusiastic teacher to overcome. Although the most of the essays do not readily lend themselves to the outline plan, it may be best in most cases that the pupil be given a brief statement of the thought of a certain portion of the essay in advance of his reading, and that the details of the thought, the reasonableness of it, the logical conclu-

sions to be drawn, and, always, the practical bearing of it upon the pupil's life be reserved for subsequent class discussion.

Such topics as structure, choice of words, types of sentences, peculiarities of style, etc., no doubt have their place in connection with essay study, but they are usually incidental and should not be forced or pursued to the detriment of the effectiveness of the thought.

## THE AMERICAN SCHOLAR.

During the five years following Emerson's resignation of his pastorate of the Second Church in Boston in September, 1832, which was his virtual withdrawal from the ministry, the fundamental ideas of his philosophy were conceived. The remainder of his life was devoted to working out and expressing the thoughts that took shape between the ages of twenty-nine and thirty-five. He had cast away from the old anchorage; he must find a new. These were years of stress. He had stood aside from the world; he felt that the world did not want him; yet he had resolved to do his part. "He had achieved self-reliance"; he was sure of the most satisfactory compensation, the approval of his own soul; he was making himself "The American Scholar." "Hereafter," he writes, "I design not to utter any speech, poem, or book that is not entirely and peculiarly my work."

He came to feel that the entire universe was his own, and that Nature, God, and Man were one. His sensitive soul revolted at the materialistic ideas of the preceding generations. He had been born to a philosophy which had denied the power of the mind to form ideas except from impressions received through the senses, which affirmed that morality is a thing based on custom or utility. Both reason and intuition, which was the basis of his faith, told him that the mind has creative energy, that it has a faculty *transcending* the senses and the understanding. Hence, Emerson and those whom his ideas attracted were called Transcendentalists, a term generally applied to those who believe that reality can be reached by processes of thought.

The first expression of "The New Thought," as Transcendentalism was sometimes called, was made in *Nature*, published in 1836. This little "arsenal of ideas" attracted little attention at first, but it is

the storehouse of power constantly drew. It contains the embryonic idea of philosophy.

The first application of the idea was made in his address on *The American Scholar* delivered a year later. Of this Bronson Alcott, father of the author of *Little Men* and *Little Women*, says, "I believe that it was the first adequate statement of the new views that really attracted general attention. I had the good fortune to hear that address; and I shall not forget the delight with which I heard it, nor the mixed confusion, consternation, surprise, and wonder with which the audience listened to it." Lowell's comment on the same occasion may be found on page 17 of the Introduction. Dr. Oliver Wendell Holmes called it "The Declaration of Independence of American Literature." The address forms the best possible introduction to the study of Emerson, as it is in the nature of a preface to his whole philosophy of life.

### SELF-RELIANCE.

Although the central thought of Self-Reliance had been incorporated in several of Emerson's early occasional addresses, the essay first appeared in the present form in the first series of essays published in 1841. The introduction in the Centenary Edition says:—"Thus it appears that the writings of Landor . . . may have given the original push towards the writing of this essay. A small portion of the essay came from the lecture on *Individualism*, the last in the course on the *Philosophy of History*, delivered in 1836-37, and other passages are taken from the lectures, *School*, *Genius*, and *Duty*, in the course on *Human Life*, 1838-39."

After the study of *The American Scholar* the student will be prepared to meet Emerson's idea of self-trust which, as is stated on page 35, embraces all the duties of the scholar. The whole essay may in fact be presented as a development of one topic of the Phi Beta Kappa address. Three things, however, should be made plain at the outset; first, that Emerson is often led into seemingly extreme statements through his fear of weakening the effect of his expression of a firm conviction by qualifying it; second, that the student should endeavor to apply the author's own dictum to his study and interpretation of the essay,—to trust, as it were, his own reason in a meas-

ure; and third, that  
a misnomer ultimately  
the universe."

... says, "Self-reliance is  
... in the constitution of

Of this last a word needs to be said. It must be remembered that all of Emerson's philosophy of the conduct of life is based on the idea that Nature, Man, and God are one, and that all that is best in man is his portion of the divine spirit. Hence, in trusting to self, he means to the highest self, or to the divine within man. So, as some one has said, self-reliance is God-reliance. We know the divine within us through intuition. This intuitive relation is the supernatural factor in man, the manifestation in consciousness of the universal spirit. This theory of intuition dominates the German literature of the time, and was interpreted to the English speaking world by Coleridge, Carlyle, and Wordsworth. To this theory Emerson added, naturally enough, the conception that genius is "the true oracle of heaven." As Cooke says, "While the earlier mystics taught Emerson the doctrine of self-renunciation and dependence on God, all the later Germans he read taught individuality and self-reliance. He combined the two ideas and made them one." Hence, we have independence through dependence upon the promptings of one's inmost nature. In *Letters and Social Aims* he writes of this higher self, "and in this self-respect, or hearkening to the privatest oracle, he need never be at a loss. In morals, this is conscience; in intellect, genius; in practice, talent: not to imitate or surpass a particular man in his way, but to bring out your own new way."

Whatever may be thought of the details of the working out of this philosophy, the essay is "a clarion call" to the best that is in young people. It arouses all the native aspirations of the individual. It is stimulating to feel that each of us has something within him which makes him "a new creature with a value of his own."

## COMPENSATION.

No essay of Emerson's, as Bliss Perry remarks, opens more happily or more naturally than the one on *Compensation*. The ease and evident pleasure with which he approaches his great subject make the essay seem to grow out of his long meditation now clarified and given



definiteness by the incident of the sermon. This uncommonly attractive introduction may well serve as a model for the consideration of the student.

This essay, like *Self-Reliance* which it immediately followed, appeared in 1841 in the first series. Like most of Emerson's essays it is made up in part, as the opening paragraphs suggest, of thoughts which had long been in his mind and many of which had already been expressed in his *Journal* or elsewhere; but, unlike many of the others, it does not seem, as Dr. Edward Emerson notes, to have been delivered previously in the form of an address as so many of the essays were. When the essay was written, Emerson had chosen his course in life and had settled down to a quiet career as a thinker with the hope of doing his share of the world's work as a writer and lecturer. The death of his wife and of his promising brothers, Edward and Charles, and the mental and moral struggle of his withdrawal from the ministry had chastened but strengthened his spirit. He had a knowledge of love and sorrow; he had experienced success and disappointment; he had become a shrewd observer of affairs and of men, and had acquired the courage to analyze unflinchingly the cause of moral strength or weakness. Out of the fullness of these experiences and powers he wrote of retribution.

Probably none of the essays has made a wider popular appeal, and none is more worthy of consideration, because of its human interest, its concern for the affairs of everyday life, its moral encouragement, and its inspiring appeal to obedience to universal law. Few of the essays deal with a profounder philosophy, yet none are handled with more freshness, directness, and simplicity.

Its comparative simplicity of treatment and its richness in illustration drawn from practical life should make the approach to the final philosophy easy. Many of the ideas expressed in the preceding essays are repeated here in a new setting. The whole thought grows out of the author's deep-seated optimism, his unwavering belief in the goodness of things, in the necessity of obedience, and in the inevitableness of reward or punishment. "God cannot be cheated." All evil is evidence of the violation of law, and cannot long be hidden. All men are equal; all are great if obedient, because the soul is all that is, and circumstances are nothing.



## QUESTIONS AND TOPICS ON THE AMERICAN SCHOLAR.

1. Find all you can about the Phi Beta Kappa Society to-day. What is the emblem of the society? Do you know any members? (Page 21, Note 1.)
2. Do we meet for games of "strength or skill" to-day more than in 1837? (Page 21, l. 3.)
3. Are Americans too busy to give to letters to-day? Why were they especially busy in Emerson's early years? (Page 21, l. 9.)
4. Are there any signs of our "apprenticeship to other lands" still remaining? (Page 22, l. 1.)
5. What events in American life have since been "sung in song and story"? (Page 22, l. 4.)
6. Who of the great American writers had written previous to 1837? (Page 22.)
7. Do you infer that Emerson would believe in our present idea of specialization in education? (Page 22, ll. 29 ff.)
8. Has the tendency been toward or away from the division of labor since Emerson spoke? (Pages 22-23.)
9. What is the true purpose of work? Ruskin says, "When men are rightly occupied, their amusement grows out of their work, as the color petals out of a beautiful flower." (Page 23, ll. 3-11.)
10. Measured by his own definition, was Emerson a scholar? Are most pupils scholars? (Page 23, l. 13.)
11. Is Emerson's description of "the bookworm" the common idea of a scholar to-day? Do you know a "bookworm"? A real scholar? (Page 27, l. 4.)
12. If all men believed "the active soul" the only thing of value, what changes would be wrought in society? (Page 27, l. 15.)
13. How can the average person become "a creator"? (Page 27, l. 18.)
14. Why is "a strong head" needed for one who gets his wisdom only from books? (Page 29, l. 18.)
15. Do "the so-called 'practical men'" sneer at scholars in our day? Is it true that scholars are not "practical"? (Page 30, l. 18.)
16. In talking with people do you ever feel that some speak from experience; others, only from theory? (Page 31, l. 2.)
17. Do you find any evidences of Emerson's having used his knowl-

edge of arts and sciences "to illustrate and embody his perceptions"? (Page 33, l. 3.)

18. Did Emerson himself fulfill the true functions of a scholar—to cheer, to raise, and to guide men, by showing them facts amidst appearances? Do you think of any other duties of the scholar? (Page 35, l. 2.)

19. Compare the scholar's sacrifices with his opportunities. Is the reward worth the price? (Page 35.)

20. Are men as willing in our time to be "brushed like flies from the path of a great person"? Do we worship heroes? (Page 39, ll. 23 ff.)

21. Is the seeking of money, or "spoils of office," characteristic of this generation? (Page 40, l. 3.)

22. In what traits is the boy like the ancient Greeks? (Page 41, l. 12.)

23. Do you know of any instances where "Public and private avarice make the air we breathe thick and fat"? (Page 45, l. 14.)

#### QUESTIONS AND TOPICS ON SELF-RELIANCE.

1. What do you think of Emerson's definition of genius? Compare it with other definitions, especially with the familiar saying that it is "an infinite capacity for taking pains." (Page 49, l. 5.)

2. When in a man's education does the time come when he believes envy springs from ignorance, etc.? In what sense is this true? (Page 50, l. 4.)

3. Why is man "clapped into jail" by consciousness? (Page 52, l. 4.)

4. Why do these inner promptings "grow faint as we enter the world?" Why does society destroy manhood? (Page 52, ll. 15 ff.)

5. How far is it safe for the individual to refuse to conform to society? Could there be any government without the sacrifice of personal rights for the good of the whole? (Page 53.)

6. Is Emerson uncharitable? Do you know of any instances of unwise giving? Is it wise to give because it is expected of you? (Page 54, ll. 8-20.)

7. Does Emerson think men should be judged by their actions? (Page 55, l. 2.)

8. Is it safe for the average individual to ignore what people think? (Page 55, ll. 8-16.)

9. Can you think of instances when we "wear the foolish face of praise"? (Page 56, l. 17.)
10. In what respect do newspapers direct men? (Page 56, l. 30.)
11. Can you recall any men in American History who have withstood the opposition of both the cultivated classes and the masses? (Page 57, ll. 1-9.)
12. Judging from these essays, were Emerson's writings consistent? (Page 59.)
13. Can you mention other instances of institutions which are "the lengthened shadow of one man"? (Page 61, l. 7.)
14. Shall we not learn from the past? Can you formulate a statement of Emerson's idea of the value of History? (Pages 65-66.)
15. In what sense does he mean that duty to self is higher than duty to society? Have you tried doing your whole duty to yourself for one day? (Page 70, ll. 6-12.)
16. What are some of the "choices" made for us by society? (Page 70, l. 30.)
17. Can you mention instances of "sturdy lads" from the country who have surpassed the "city dolls"? Why have they succeeded? (Page 71, ll. 5-12.)
18. Why is prayer to effect a private end "theft"? (Page 72, l. 8.)
19. What do you think are the purposes of travel? What did Emerson think? (Page 74, ll. 17 ff.)
20. Are there any elements in our system of education that foster restlessness? (Page 75, l. 15.)
21. How do insurance offices increase the number of accidents? (Page 77, l. 30.)
22. Compare the men of to-day with some of the great men of antiquity. Which are greater? (Page 78.)
23. What are some of the harms of the extensive use of machinery? (Page 78, l. 17.)
24. Is it true that we place too much reliance upon property? On what should we rely? (Page 79, l. 21.)

#### QUESTIONS AND TOPICS ON COMPENSATION.

1. We are told that the sermon was the immediate *occasion* of the writing of the essay, but do you find anywhere a statement of the *purpose* of the writing? (Page 85, l. 21.)

2. Have you ever thought the bad are successful? What determines success? (Page 86, l. 20.)
3. Can you mention other illustrations of polarity? (Page 87.)
4. What are some of the disadvantages and the compensations of your climate? (Page 88, l. 14.)
5. Have you gained something for everything you have missed, etc.? A good topic for a theme. Give specific instances. (Page 88, l. 23.)
6. Do you know of instances where men of genius in their devotion to their work have neglected "father and mother, and wife and child"? Why does Emerson think it is right? Recall King Arthur's devotion to the Round Table. (Page 89, l. 20.)
7. Cite instances where high taxes have yielded no revenue, where juries have declined to inflict severe legal penalties, and where private vengeance has taken punishment into its own hands. (Page 89, ll. 29 ff.)
8. Have you tried to escape the consequences of your own acts? Do you think you succeeded? (Page 92.)
9. Is experience with the bitter side of life necessary to greatness? Think over the lives of several great men, Milton, Lincoln, Dante, and others. (Page 92, l. 25.)
10. Do you know any other proverbs that Emerson might have added to this list? (Page 96, ll. 26 ff.)
11. From what enjoyment does "the exclusive in fashionable life" exclude himself? (Page 97, l. 19.)
12. What is the cause of the fear that punishes? Fear of what? Does a man who is conscious of no wrong-doing fear? (Pages 97-98.)
13. What would be the result if all men believed that a swindler and a thief rob themselves? (Page 100, l. 10.)
14. How do opposition and blame and antagonism protect and benefit any one? Can you mention instances? (Page 102, l. 17.)
15. Apply Emerson's idea of compensation to cheating, and see why no one can be cheated except by himself. (Page 103, l. 5.)
16. How does the criminal receive punishment which we do not see? (Page 104, ll. 23-31.)
17. Do you ever wish for "the pot of buried gold," the thing you have not earned? (Page 105, l. 20.)



18. Think of some men you admire and see how far they are masters of circumstances? (Page 106, ll. 21 ff.)

19. Try to recall instances in which seeming disasters have proved blessings. (Page 107, ll. 20 ff.)

### THEME TOPICS.

1. Was Emerson a Practical Man?
2. Emerson—His Own Ideal of the American Scholar.
3. Emerson and Thoreau as Lovers of Nature.
4. Self-Reliance in the Lives of Certain Americans.
5. Striking Instances of the Wisdom of Instinct.
6. "Nature's Lawful Coin." See page 105, line 17.
7. Traits of Emerson's Character Revealed in the Essays.
8. "Room Alone and Keep a Journal." (Emerson's advice to all college students).
9. Evidences of the Law of Compensation in My Own Experience.
10. The Most Impressive Idea Emerson Has Given Me.
11. The Use of Books—Emerson's Idea and Mine.
12. What Some "Scholars" are Doing in this City.
13. Are Our Scholars Practical Men?
14. The Right Spirit and the Wrong Spirit of Foreign Travel.
15. The Greek Goddess, Nemesis.
16. The Law of Compensation in the Careers of Some Important Characters in My Reading (Brutus, Shylock, Sidney Carton, Silas Marner, Lancelot, King Arthur, Elaine, Orlando, Guinevere, Nancy Lammeter, etc.).

### NOTES TO THE AMERICAN SCHOLAR.

(*Numerals in heavy type refer to the pages of the text, the lighter ones to the lines.*)

**21: Title.** "The American Scholar" was one of Emerson's favorite themes. He spoke again at Dartmouth College in 1838 on "the resources, the subject, and the discipline of the scholar." In beginning he said, "Neither years nor books have yet availed to eradicate a prejudice rooted in me, that a scholar is the favorite of Heaven and earth, the excellency of his country, the happiest of men. His duties

lead him directly into the holy ground where other men's aspirations only point."

23: 26. Nowhere is Emerson more poetic, more eloquent, than when describing Nature. Read the opening paragraphs of the essay on *Nature*.

24: 12. Classification begins. Emerson had no sympathy with pure science, classification for the sake of classification. To him science was interesting and profitable only as it revealed the truth concerning the unity of all things.

25: 3. Soul of his soul. The epitome of Emerson's idea of Nature.

25: 29. Quick thought. Living thought. Compare "the quick and the dead."

25: 29. It now endures, etc. Notice the three important functions of a book—to preserve, to spread, and to stimulate thought.

26. By all means read Ruskin's definition of a book in *Kings' Treasuries*.

26: 27. Not from their own sight, etc. Emerson was a firm believer in the rightness of intuition.

27: 27. The pure efflux of the Deity. Man becomes divine only when he becomes a creator.

28: 9. Genius . . . the enemy of genius. Why?

28: 13. Right way of reading. Read also Ruskin's discussion of how to read in *Kings' Treasuries*.

28: 21. We hear, that we may speak. Holmes said that he talked to find out what he thought.

29: 2. Abstraction of all *time*, i. e., they deal with ideas of permanent interest.

30: 7. Aim not to drill. Drill is only a means to give power to create.

30: 16. There goes in the world a notion, etc. Compare this statement of the popular idea of a scholar with George William Curtis' discussion of the same topic in "The Duty of the American Scholar," in *Orations and Addresses*, Vol. 1, p. 7.

30: 27. Without it, he is not yet man. Curtis speaks of Milton as the ideal type of scholar, because he forsook his scholarly delights to participate in the great Puritan struggle, and then out of his "action" wrote his great epic, *Paradise Lost*.

30: 31. Heroic mind. In the first year of the Civil War, Emerson

said to the colleges, "Against the heroism of soldiers, I set the heroism of scholars." Ponder their sacrifices described on pages 35 and 36.

31: 4. *Other me.* Read again his idea of the relation of Man and Nature, page 25.

31: 7. *I grasp the hands of those next me, etc.* Dr. Edward Everett Hale in his address on the ninetieth anniversary of Emerson's birth gives many illustrations of Emerson's practical mingling with affairs and with men.

31: 16. *Drudgery, calamity, etc.* Emerson always believed that he owed "much of the vigor, the rigor, and the manhood of his life," to his early struggles with poverty. Read Hale's anecdote on this point.

31: 26. *Not so with our recent actions.* It is said that the historian Bancroft felt that he could deal impassionately only with the history of America previous to the Revolution.

32: 27. *If it were only for a vocabulary, etc.* A paragraph well worth study for both thought and expression.

33: 16. The idea of "Polarity" is further elaborated in *Compensation*.

33: 19. *Each fit reproduces the other.* Thought bears fruit in action; action gives rise to thought.

34: 7. *Not out of those, etc.* Some one has said that the city draws its men of vigor largely from the boys of the country.

34: 12. Ruskin is another example of a man of culture who believed profoundly in the duty of manual labor.

35: 2. *Self-trust.* In his Dartmouth address, Emerson said, "The whole value of history, of biography, is to increase my self-trust, by demonstrating what man can be and do." The idea is developed in *Self-Reliance*.

35. Do you find here anything of autobiographical significance?

36: 16. *He and he only knows the world.* All others are deceived by insignificant details of the moment. Curtis and Ruskin both speak of the need of the scholar's seeing beyond the present appearances and resisting the whims of what Ruskin calls "the mob."

36: 32. *He has descended into the secrets of all minds,* because Emerson believed all minds are one.

37: 13. *This is my music; this is myself.* Compare with Ruskin's definition of a book, *Kings' Treasuries*, paragraph 9.

37: 18. **Fear always springs from ignorance.** Cf. *Heroism*. "Self-trust is the essence of Heroism."

37: 27. **Whelping of this lion**, i. e., find the real nature of our fear.

38: 9. **Takes his signet and form.** Cf. "One is seal, and one is print," page 25.

38: 11. **Kings of the world.** Read Ruskin's description of the true king in *Kings' Treasuries*, paragraph 45.

39: 13. **In a century**, etc. Edward Everett Hale says of Emerson, "There are possibly ten such men, probably not so many, in the nineteen centuries."

39: 15. **All the rest**, etc. Emerson works out this idea in *Representative Men*. Cf., also, Carlyle's *Heroes and Hero Worship*.

40: 6. **Wake them.** This is the great problem of civilization—to awaken men to see the truth.

40: 10. **The main enterprise**, etc. A statement of his belief in the eternal progress or evolution of mankind.

41: 12. **The boy is a Greek.** He has the characteristics of the ancient Greeks. The history of the race is repeated in the individual.

41: 16. **Age of Introversion.** These were the times following Romanticism in poetry, one characteristic of which was subjectivity, or "the looking within."

41: 18. **Hankering to know whereof the pleasure consists.** The scientific spirit of the Victorian period just beginning was influencing the poets to seek the reason for all things. See Tennyson's *Flower in the Cranied Wall*.

41: 30. **Age of Revolution.** The literary period just closing in 1837 is frequently called the Revolutionary period because of its revolt against formalism.

42: 9. **Elevation of . . . the lowest class.** Emerson is speaking in the time of the great social and political reform in England. The Reform Bill in 1832 extended the franchise to the middle class. The slaves were freed in 1833.

42: 11. **The near, the low**, etc. The poets of the period, notably Wordsworth, were exalting the beauty and worth of common things.

42: 23. **Give me insight into to-day.** Another illustration of the practicality of Emerson's idealism.

42: 25. **The meal in the firkin**, etc. This passage admirably presents Emerson's idea of the oneness of things.



44: 6. **Emanuel Swedenborg.** Even while in college Emerson responded sympathetically to the teachings of Swedenborg.

45: 1. **Help must come from the bosom alone.** Cf. "Man is his own star."

45: 16. **See already the tragic consequence.** Emerson blamed the scholar for many of the conditions that led to the Civil War. In an address during the first year of the war he said, "'T is because the scholars did not learn and teach, because they were traders and left their altars and libraries and worship of truth, and played the sycophant to presidents and generals and members of Congress."

45: 28. **Patience, etc.** A stirring appeal to young men to "wake," and to believe in their own highest instincts.

### NOTES TO SELF-RELIANCE.

47. It was Emerson's custom to preface his essays with a poetic quotation, or a bit of his own verse, or with both, as in this case. Some of his best epigrammatic verse is in these prefatory stanzas. See the stanza preceding the essay on *History*. Oliver Wendell Holmes suggests that this is an impulse inherited from generations of ministerial ancestors who were accustomed to using texts for their sermons.

48. With all of Emerson's sensitiveness and delicacy of spirit, there went a profound admiration for ruggedness, the energy of earth, physical endurance, and power. Napoleon interested him more than any other man in history. He wrote, "These Hoosiers and Suckers are better than the *sniveling* opposition." Dr. Edward Emerson in his address at the opening of Emerson Hall at Harvard, said, "But the mother-wit of an Irish girl, the shrewd courage of a hump-backed hostler, the confidence of a State Street merchant, the farmer's dealing with the clod, the chemist's with the crystal, were as suggestive to him as a page of Goethe."

49: 1. **Eminent painter.** The Centenary Edition suggests that either William Blake or Washington Allston is meant. Blake, especially, was original.

49: 18. **Our own rejected thoughts.** Ruskin says the average person reads to find his own thoughts expressed.

50: 14. **Preëstablished harmony.** A technical term from the philosophy of Leibnitz, used in his attempts to explain the uniformity of

the impressions made upon mind by matter as existing in a harmony established from the beginning. See *Century Dictionary*.

51: 5. **What pretty oracles nature yields us**, etc. Emerson was a great lover of children and young people, and felt more at home with them than with his contemporaries. Wordsworth in his *Ode on Intimations of Immortality* beautifully expresses his faith in the rightness of the instincts of childhood. Read the opening stanzas.

51: 26. **He tries and sentences them**, etc. Compare with the following from *Education*, "They know truth from counterfeit as quick as the chemist does. They detect weakness in your eye and behavior a week before you open your mouth. . . . If I can pass with them, I can manage well enough with their fathers."

52: 5. **Clapped into jail**. Compare again with Wordsworth's *Ode on Intimations of Immortality*, stanza 5,

"Shades of the prison house begin to close  
Upon the growing Boy."

52: 25. **Explore if it be goodness**. Cf. 1 Thessalonians v. 21.

53: 11. **Good and bad**. Cf. Hamlet, II. 2, "There is nothing either good or bad, but thinking makes it so."

53: 12. **After my constitution**. Notice the double implication in "constitution"—the political and the moral sense of the word.

53: 26. **Spite at home**. In turning your attention to things remote, you neglect things close by. Cf. "Charity begins at home."

54: 3. **I shun father and mother**, etc. Cf. Matt. x. 37.

54: 22. **Man and his virtues**, i. e., we usually think of men and their virtues as separate.

55: 14. **Great man**. Is not this a test of real greatness?

56: 24. **Sour face**. The first stroke of displeasure—the disapproval of your associates.

57: 22. **Motions**. Natural impulses. Cf. "emotions."

58: 6. **To be great is to be misunderstood**. Remember this epigram. Why is it true?

58: 11. **Acrostic, palindrome**. "Madam, I'm Adam," and Napoleon's remark, "Able was I ere I saw Elba," are examples.

58: 13. **Contrite wood-life, humble, simple life**. Emerson withdrew to Concord to be able to lead a simple life close to nature,

59: 3. My book should smell of pines, etc. In his *Journal* in 1841 he wrote, "All my thoughts are foresters. I have scarce a day-dream on which the breath of the pines has not blown and their shadows waved. Shall I not therefore call my little book *Forest Essays*?"

59: 6. Character teaches above our wills. Our characters are influential for good or bad whether we wish it or not.

60: 20. He measures you, i. e., the true man is the standard by which all are measured.

60: 23. Takes place. An old expression for takes precedence of. See *place* in Century Dictionary.

61: 7. An institution, etc. An example of one of Emerson's pithy sentences. It was his custom to work over such thoughts again and again until the expression suited the thought. He kept a book of such sentences which he incorporated in his essays as opportunity came.

61: 11. All history, etc. Emerson's reading was largely biography. He loved the individuality in historic characters. It was his custom to copy anecdotes of famous people. Plutarch and his heroes were his delight. Dr. Holmes arranges the number of his references to great men in the following order: Shakespeare, Napoleon, Plato, Plutarch.

61: 14. Steal. Creep about.

62: 15. Our reading, etc. We become flatterers of rank; we give too much attention to kings and princes and too little to common men.

63: 2. Symbol, i. e., the king, a symbol of the power and dignity of man.

63: 11. Who is the Trustee? This paragraph needs careful attention. It explains the whole ground of Emerson's idea of Self-Reliance. We should "obey" or "acquiesce" in the promptings of Instinct, which is the working of the "Over-Soul," or the Universal Mind, in our minds. Hence, "the Trustee," the "aboriginal self," is the Universal Mind. Elsewhere he says there is "one mind common to all individual men," and "every man is an inlet to the same and to all of the same."

63: 19. All later teachings, etc. Find Wordsworth's expression of this in the *Ode on Intimations of Immortality*.

64: 9. Perceptions. This term is used to signify the application of the intellect to the facts of life.

64: 12. **My willful actions.** He places instinct above reason always.

64: 18. **Fatal, inevitable, fateful.** An old use of the word. Emerson frequently uses words in their original sense.

65: 4. **Worship of the past.** Emerson was a believer in the "thousand-eyed present." Genius, he says, is characterized by a neglect of yesterday and a "reliance upon the inspiration of to-day."

65: 9. **Apologue.** Æsop's fables are good examples of apologues.

65: 12. **Ashamed before.** Put to shame by.

66: 7. **His voice shall be as sweet, etc.** The richness and the music of Emerson's voice impressed all who heard him. One who heard him preach in New Bedford says, "One day there came into our pulpit the most gracious of mortals, with a face all benignity, who gave out the first hymn and made the first prayer as an angel might have read and prayed. Our choir was a good one, but its best was coarse and discordant after Emerson's voice."

67: 5. **Obedience.** See Note 63, line 11.

67: 20. **Power** he defines elsewhere as "a sharing of the nature of the world."

68: 2. **Beside.** In comparison with.

68: 3. **Mob.** Cf. again Ruskin's *Kings' Treasuries*, paragraph 30.

68: 6. **We must go alone.** All useful union must be purely within. Cf. "The union is only perfect when all the uniters are isolated."

68: 25. **Resist our temptations.** This is the negative or defensive side of self-reliance.

69: 27. **Rejection of all standard.** When Emerson rejected the common standards of the pulpit, he was bitterly assailed on all sides as unchristian, an atheist, etc.

70: 4. **Consider whether you have satisfied, etc.** Consider the fine scorn of this passage.

70: 24. **No great and perfect persons.** This subject is still further treated in *Character*.

71: 5. **Sturdy lad.** Another instance of his admiration of native power. See Note 48.

71: 17. **Ashamed of our compassion.** Read Ruskin's treatment of this topic in *Kings' Treasuries*, paragraph 36—"You despise compassion," etc.

72: 3. **Prayer that craves a particular commodity, etc.** One of



Emerson's stipulations in his occasional ministerial work was that he would offer prayer only when he felt moved to do so.

72: 9. **Dualism.** Man and God as separate instead of one.

72: 11. **Prayer in all action.** Cf. Sir Philip Sidney's, "God helps them who help themselves."

73: 7. **Creeds.** Creeds bind the beliefs of man in groups or sects, while Emerson's philosophy says that each man should think and feel independently.

74: 13. **Pinfold.** Cf. *Comus*, line 7, "Confined and pestered in this pinfold here."

74: 22. **Soul is no traveler.** Emerson made trips abroad in 1831, 1847, and 1872, but with none of them was he satisfied, for he constantly yearned for home and family.

75: 11. **My giant.** Explain what is meant by "giant."

75: 17. **We imitate.** A reiteration of his belief in the individual and in the present.

76: 1. **The precise thing to be done.** Here we have the very principle of all art—the fitness of the thing produced to the environment and the thought.

76: 10. **No man yet knows, etc.** Cf. Ruskin's definition of a book in *Sesame and Lilies*.

76: 19. **Colossal chisel.** A transferred epithet. Colossal really applies to the product of the chisel.

77: 2. **Foreworld.** An original or ideal state.

77: 10. **Something is taken.** Cf. *Compensation*.

78: 17. **The harm of . . . machinery.** Many of the thinkers of the Victorian Period questioned seriously the ultimate value of the wonderful advance in the use of machinery. Look up Ruskin's ideas on the subject.

79: 25. **Guards of property.** Ex-President Roosevelt in his address before the French Academy in April, 1910, said, "We must place human rights before property rights."

80: 8. **Living property.** Read Ruskin's discussion of "real treasures" in *Kings' Treasuries*, paragraph 45.

80: 11. **Thy lot or portion of life, etc.** See second motto of *Compensation*.

81: 3. **Use all that is called Fortune, etc.** This paragraph is an admirable summing up of all that has gone before.

## NOTES TO COMPENSATION.

**83-84.** In the two introductory stanzas are expressed the two essential phases of the thought of the whole essay; first, the dualism, "polarity," or balanced nature of the universe; and second, the inevitableness of retribution. Notice, too, that in the first instance, though there is dualism in everything, there is also unity, as all things are alike; and that in the second stanza, beneath the compensatory philosophy, is the thought that man is above his environment. The imagery of the first motto illustrates the charm which astronomical phenomena always had for Emerson.

**84: 7. Deserts.** Where is the accent?

**85: 1. Ever since I was a boy.** In the early days of his ministry, June, 1831, he wrote in his *Journal*, "Is not the law of Compensation perfect? . . . 'The gods sell all things.'—Well, old man, hast got no farther? Why, this was taught thee months and years ago. It was writ on the autumn leaves at Roxbury in keep-school days—it sounded in the blind man's ear at Cambridge. . . . And I have nothing characterized in my brain that outlives this word Compensation."

**86: 17. You sin now, etc.** An illustration of Emerson's startling manner of expressing a generally half-realized thought.

**86: 24. Announcing the presence of the soul, i. e.,** he does not consider soul-success; he thinks only of material success.

**86: 32. Men are better, etc.** Another instance of Emerson's lack of confidence in so-called human institutions or systems. Cf. his idea of governments.

**87: 4. Wiser than they know.** Another way of saying that their instincts are better than their intellects. This furnishes the keynote to several essays. Cf. Pascal: "Le cœur a ses raisons, que la raison ne connaît pas." Emerson was a great admirer of the French philosopher.

**87: 8. Answered by a silence.** May this sometimes be "the foolish face of praise"? See *Self-Reliance*, page 56.

**87: 13. This circle.** The circle is the symbol of perfection and of eternity; hence, the perfect and eternal law of compensation.

**87: 14. Polarity.** The law of contraries of Plato, and a prominent idea in the philosophy of Kant and Goethe. With Emerson it is one of the universal laws of nature. "Mind is with him the positive, and

matter the negative expression of the Universal Spirit." Cf. the recent theory of ions.

**88: 14. Compensating errors.** Error is here used in its etymological sense of wandering or deviating from the regular course. According to Lagrange's theory of the solar system each planet may undergo various changes in its orbit both in eccentricity and in inclination, but the balance of the whole system is always maintained.

**88: 23. For everything you have missed.** Cf. *Self-Reliance*, page 77.

**89: 6. Intenerate.** Another instance of the author's fondness for etymology. Look up the derivation of the word.

**89: 10. Cost him all his peace.** Many of our presidents in recent years have expressed this thought.

**89: 14. Permanent.** Why?

**89: 16. Charges of that eminence.** Worries, cares. Cf. Goldsmith's *The Deserted Village*, lines 97-108.

**89: 18. Bear witness to the light.** John i. 7.

**89: 20. Incessant.** An example of the accurate use of words. Notice the active sense of the word as explained in the Century Dictionary.

**89: 23. A byword and a hissing.** Another instance of Emerson's frequent use of Biblical phraseology. Emerson felt that he had incurred this penalty by his devotion to truth.

**90: 11. These appearances, etc.** This and the following paragraph are passages often quoted to show Emerson's theory of the oneness of things. Though Darwin's *Origin of Species* did not appear until 1859, the evolutionary theory was already in the air—the theory that all forms of life have developed from one original germ of life.

**90: 30. The true doctrine, etc.** Is Emerson a pantheist? Look up the word in the Century Dictionary.

**91: 9. Οἱ κύβοι, etc.** A fragment from a lost play of Sophocles.

**91: 13. Every secret, etc.** See Introduction, page 19.

**91: 19. Every act, etc.** A difficult passage. The act and its reward or punishment are inseparable; hence, the two become one or are integrated, first, because each act has its own reward in the doing of it, and second, it has its reward in a train of attendant circumstances. The intellect sees the circumstantial reward, but only the soul sees the real reward in the act itself.

92: 21. **Truck and higgie.** See Century Dictionary. Both words are colloquial in New England in the sense of barter.

93: 13. **To try is to be mad.** The attempt to separate the act from its retribution becomes an insane hobby that so acts upon the mind as to blind it to the actual truths.

93: 24. **Fable.** Emerson implies in the illustrations following that the essential truth of the myths, etc., is the reason of their survival.

94: 1. **Prometheus.** For these stories in full, see Gayley's *Classic Myths*, or Bulfinch's *Age of Fable*.

94: 4. **Of all the gods, etc.** From Æschylus' *Prometheus*.

95: 9. **All things are sold.** Read Lowell's *Vision of Sir Launfal*, Prelude, lines 21-30, "Earth gets its price for what Earth gives us," etc.

97: 9. **Judges himself.** Reveals what manner of man he is.

97: 13. **A harpoon.** During his occasional preaching visits to New Bedford, Emerson became much interested in the adventures of the whale fishers.

99: 14. **To ask for it.** To get it for the asking. A household maxim with Emerson.

99: 30. **Worm worms.** Compare with the story of the storing up of the manna, Exodus xvi.

100: 28. **Budgets.** The annual financial statement with an estimate of the necessary taxes for the ensuing year.

100: 35. **Exalt his business.** An argument often used in these days to show the mental and moral value of manual and industrial training.

101: 1. **The league, etc.** An admirable paragraph. Study its structure. Emerson believed that all nature is moral. Professor Woodberry says his essays are "the best of lay sermons."

101: 4. **No den, etc.** Compare this passage with Webster's celebrated discussion of the same topic in his speech in the White murder case.

101: 23. **Winds blow and waters roll, etc.** From Wordsworth's sonnet, *Near Dover*.

102: 4. **Thank his faults.** This whole passage is transcribed from his *Journal* and is purely personal. He realized very keenly his own limitations, and often said they were elements in his success.

102: 11. **Mends his shell with pearl.** Look up the formation of pearls. See Century Dictionary.



102: 25. I hate, etc. Another transcription from his *Journal* written two months after the bitter attack made upon him by the Boston clergy for his rather radical advice to young ministers in his Divinity School Address.

103: 18. Read again Ruskin's discussion of a mob, *Kings' Treasuries*, paragraph 30.

103: 19. Traversing. An uncommon use of the word in the sense of to thwart or to obstruct.

103: 27. The martyr, etc. Remember that Garrison a few years previous was dragged through the streets of Boston. Has his compensation come?

104: 5. What boots it to do well? Cf. Milton's *Lycidas*, lines 64-84.

104: 13. Essence. Look up the derivation of this word, and see how Emerson has translated "Being" into its Latin equivalent, and has then followed it with God. A compact statement of the whole philosophy of the Universal Spirit.

105: 2. Chaos. For the mythology of Chaos see Gayley's *Classic Myths*, pages 37-38.

105: 27. Nothing can work me damage, etc. A favorite maxim with Dr. Johnson.

106: 25. The shellfish, etc. By all means read Holmes' *The Chambered Nautilus*, written in 1851. The same thought is expressed in Longfellow's *Excelsior*, and in Spenser's *An Hymne in Honour of Beautie*.

107: 11. Force in to-day. This whole passage is another statement of Emerson's belief in the greatness of the present, and of his disregard of the past. See page 42, line 23.

# A HISTORY OF ENGLISH LITERATURE

By REUBEN POST HALLECK, M.A. (Yale),  
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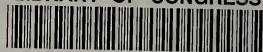
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